

C. B. Peter

Our Father!

***An Indian Christian Prays the
Lord's Prayer***



**From the bestselling
author of
*A Guide to Academic
Writing***

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Our Father

Zapf Chancery Tertiary Level Publications

- A Guide to Academic Writing* by C. B. Peter (1994)
- Africa in the 21st Century* by Eric M. Aseka (1996)
- Women in Development* by Egara Kabaji (1997)
- Introducing Social Science: A Guidebook* by J. H. van Doorne (2000)
- Elementary Statistics* by J. H. van Doorne (2001)
- Iteso Survival Rites on the Birth of Twins* by Festus B. Omusolo (2001)
- The Church in the New Millennium: Three Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* by John Stott (2002)
- Introduction to Philosophy in an African Perspective* by Cletus N. Chukwu (2002)
- Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation* by Francis W. Mulwa and Simon N. Nguluu (2003)
- Applied Ethics and HIV/AIDS in Africa* by Cletus N. Chukwu (2003)
- For God and Humanity: 100 Years of St. Paul's United Theological College* Edited by Emily Onyango (2003)
- Establishing and Managing School Libraries and Resource Centres* by Margaret Makenzi and Raymond Ongus (2003)
- Introduction to the Study of Religion* by Nehemiah Nyaundi (2003)
- A Guest in God's World: Memories of Madagascar* by Patricia McGregor (2004)
- Introduction to Critical Thinking* by J. Kahiga Kiruki (2004)
- Theological Education in Contemporary Africa* edited by Grant LeMarquand and Joseph D. Galgalo (2004)
- Looking Religion in the Eye* edited by Kennedy Onkware (2004)
- Computer Programming: Theory and Practice* by Gerald Injendi (2005)
- Demystifying Participatory Development* by Francis W. Mulwa (2005)
- Music Education in Kenya: A Historical Perspective* by Hellen A. Odwar (2005)
- Into the Sunshine: Integrating HIV/AIDS into Ethics Curriculum* Edited by Charles Klagba and C. B. Peter (2005)
- Integrating HIV/AIDS into Ethics Curriculum: Suggested Modules* Edited by Charles Klagba (2005)
- Dying Voice (An Anthropological Novel)* by Andrew K. Tanui (2006)
- Participatory Learning and Action (PLA): A Guide to Best Practice* by Enoch Harun Opuka (2006)
- Science and Human Values: Essays in Science, Religion, and Modern Ethical Issues* edited by Nehemiah Nyaundi and Kennedy Onkware (2006)
- Understanding Adolescent Behaviour* by Daniel Kasomo (2006)
- Students' Handbook for Guidance and Counselling* by Daniel Kasomo (2007)
- Business Organization and Management: Questions and Answers* by Musa O. Nyakora (2007)
- Auditing Principles: A Students' Handbook* by Musa O. Nyakora (2007)
- The Concept of Botho and HIV/AIDS in Botswana* edited by Joseph B. R. Gaie and Sana K. MMolai (2007)
- Captive of Fate: A Novel* by Ketty Arucy (2007)
- A Guide to Ethics* by Joseph Njino (2008)
- An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* by John M. M. Kasyoka (2008)
- Pastoral Theology: Rediscovering African Models and Methods* by John Ndung'u Ikenye (2009)

(Continued after Index)

Our Father
An Indian Christian Prays
the Lord's Prayer

The Rev. C. B. Peter

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Theology
St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya



Zapf Chancery
Limuru, Kenya

First Published 2011

©C. B. Peter

All rights reserved.

Cover Concept and Design

Zapf Chancery

Associate Designer and Typesetter

Nancy Njeri

Copyediting and Peer Reviewing

Drs. John and Phyllis Chesworth

Printed by

Kijabe Printing Press,

P. O. Box 40,

Kijabe.

Published by



Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa Ltd,

C/O St. Paul's University

P. O. Box Private Bag,

Limuru - 00217, Kenya.

Email: zapfchancerykenya@yahoo.co.uk

Mobile: 0721-222 311

ISBN 978-9966-1506-7-7

*This book has been printed on fully
recyclable, environment-friendly paper.*

TO MONALISA, MONICA,
PRATIKSHA (LATE), AND ALBERT
It feels so divine when they call me FATHER!

All persons, places, and events described in this book are real, and if they do not resemble any real persons, places, or events, well that is purely coincidental.

Foreword by the Reverend Canon Professor Joseph Galgalo

CB's sub-title "an Indian Christian prays the Lord's prayer," brought to my mind the realization that this is one prayer that perhaps has been around the longest, recited daily by millions of Christians around the world, and has been translated into thousands, if not tens of thousands of world languages. It also occurred to me that the 'Lord's Prayer' is not only the most popular prayer among most Christian denominations but also a subject of many great writings—both academic and devotional. To ask, what new thing can anyone say about the Lord's Prayer is as good as asking how many times an average Christian would possibly recite the Lord's Prayer in a lifetime.

CB's contribution is unique. He aptly brings out the reality that is in the power of praying with the words of the Lord's Prayer, a spiritual exercise that is totally different from simple recitation or even ingenious exegesis of the same prayer. The idea that the Lord's Prayer petitions the oneness of heaven and earth, the oneness of all humanity as the children of one Father, the integration of all dimensions of one humanity standing in need of the providence of one and the only God—to feed, to forgive, to preserve from temptation, to deliver from evil, etc—is a fresh line of thought that CB explores. His contribution is truly a valuable offering that, understood correctly, can aid refresh our perspectives every time we offer our prayer in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Once you read CB's '*Our Father*' you cannot help but flow with the dynamic of the call to action. The ball is in our court—that we not only truly mean what we say, as we recite those very familiar

words, but also live as we profess. He clearly brings out a depth of ethics that is often assumed or overlooked as the main thrust of the Lord's Prayer. CB does not just remind us that Jesus said, 'And when you pray say ...,' but purposely echoes, Jesus' words, 'And go and do likewise.' The latter, in my view, is the inner logic of the Lord's Prayer, as CB drives the point home when asks, "what is the special import of this prayer for Christians?"

If ethics is the lesson of the Lord's Prayer, theology is its substance; and on this score, CB is again very impressive. A particular strength in this regard is that CB aptly explores the Trinitarian, as well as the key theological and Christological teachings of the Lord's Prayer. The thread of 'oneness' runs through the entire work neatly tying together the themes of creation, providence, human nature, earth, heaven and hell, giving the reader a panoramic view of theological topics beginning from the very beginning and running through to the eschaton. Reading CB, I got simply amazed by the theological richness of the Lord's Prayer.

I commend my dear friend and colleague CB for this creative and valuable offering of the Lord's Prayer in form of a book. I commend this work to everyone who prays the Lord's Prayer to read it, think through what it means for a contextually placed and culturally aligned Christian to pray it, but above all, live it!

Prof. Joseph D Galgalo
Vice Chancellor, St. Paul's University
August, 2011

Foreword by Dr. John Blevins

In writing the foreword to this text, I offer the reader a word of warning: be prepared. Be prepared to think and reflect deeply about your own beliefs; you are about to read a shocking book! Be prepared to assess honestly your own spiritual life of prayer and discipleship in your daily living; you are about to read a book that persistently asks you to engage in such honest assessment. This short book is profound in many ways, not the least of which is in its challenges to us, its readers.

Our Father is an accessible but theologically astute book, employing sound Biblical scholarship, systematic theological reflection, and socio-cultural assessment to help us understand the profound implications for our time in history of the sixty-seven words that comprise the Lord's Prayer. It also reflects the wisdom, love of storytelling, and delightful humor of its author, the Reverend Christopher Benjamin Peter, known as "CB" to the countless students, lay people, clergy, and colleagues he has influenced in his years of scholarship, teaching, and ministry.

Although *Our Father* is grounded in the deep roots of Christian theological reflection, it is neither staid nor bogged down in abstractions. In this book, CB calls us to peace and justice not as concepts but as the never-finished work of our faithful response to God's grace lived out in the messy, beautiful, tragic, lovely world that we inhabit. The gospels are radical in their demands but we have managed to domesticate them over the years, sometimes employing theology as an instrument of such domestication. This

book refuses to contribute to such an enterprise. Rather, it serves as a reminder of the radical implications of Christian belief and practice and helps us to understand what a revolutionary act prayer can—and should—be. Though profound and demanding in its implications, the theology in this book is not a triumphal claim that Christians have figured out the world but a humble acknowledgement of how much we need God’s grace even as it calls us to pray that “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In short, CB has provided us, his readers, a gift with this text. Like many profound gifts, it offers us comfort and tweaks us out of our complacency. It reminds us of deep truths and also reminds us that we have not fully grasped those truths. It leads us into new insights embedded within words that may have grown overly-familiar through repetition and it asks us not to limit ourselves merely to those intellectual insights but to employ them in our prayers, our discipleship, and our relationship to others in the world.

As a reader, I only know of only one appropriate response to such a gift, though I am afraid it cannot be adequately conveyed in my words: *Thank you, CB, for this book. And thanks be to God!*

John Blevins
Associate Research Professor
Rollins School of Public Health
Emory University
Atlanta, GA USA

Preface

The original text of this book comprised a series of sermons, which I preached in the chapel of Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, India between 1984 and 1986. A Christian broadcasting studio invited me in 1987 to preach a modified version of the series over Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, and so the sermons went on air. The response that I received encouraged me to re-edit the text in the form of the present book.

The text has been thoroughly revised and updated. Over the past quarter of a century, I have learnt a lot, and have grown in the experience of God's love through Christ. Such growth has enabled me to abandon some of the rather too radical theological convictions of the restless age of my youth, and has led me through a sobering experience of transformation in a spirit of Christian humility. Such a spirit has reflected itself in my task of revising the manuscript.

Since these sermons were originally prepared and delivered one at a time, over a period of two years, they reflect diverse styles and approaches depending on my changing moods over that period.

I am sincerely grateful to my former colleagues, mentors and peer-reviewers at St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya, Drs. John and Phyllis Chesworth, for their labour of love on my manuscript. They helped me improve my Indian English, making it fit for your consumption!

I am further grateful to my benefactors, mentors, and peer-reviewers, the Rev. Prof. Joseph Galgalo, Vice Chancellor, St. Paul's University, Limuru, and Dr. John Blevins, Associate Research

Professor, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University Atlanta
GA (USA), for kindly critiquing the final copy and writing the
forewords.

To God be the glory!

CBP

Contents

<i>Foreword by the Reverened Canon Professor Joseph Galgalo</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Foreword by Dr. John Blevins</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
 Chapter One: Our Father	 1
From Being to Becoming	2
From “Myness” to “Ourness”	3
From Theological to Christological	4
A Trinitarian Mystery?	6
 Chapter Two: Who Art in Heaven	 9
Heaven & Earth or Heaven & Hell?	9
Hell on Earth?	10
Does God Need a Home?	11
Where is Heaven?	13
God in Heaven and on Earth	13
 Chapter Three: Hallowed Be	 15
Holiness in the Bible	15
The Experience of Holiness	17
An Otherness with a Difference	17

Chapter Four: Thy Name	21
Why Hallowed Be Thy Name?	22
To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!	23
No Other Name	24
 Chapter Five: Thy Kingdom Come	 25
The Idea of the “Kingdom of God”	25
The Jewish Aspirations about the Kingdom of God	26
The Meaning of the Kingdom	28
The Kingdom in Jesus’ Parables	29
 Chapter Six: Thy Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven	 31
Is This God’s Will?	32
What is God’s Will?	32
The Helpless Almighty?	33
The Bad Earth	33
Taking History Seriously	34
Prayers or Shopping Lists?	34
A Supra-Individual Commitment	35
 Chapter Seven: Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread	 37
God at the Dining Table	38
From the Field to the Dining Table	39
Not by Bread Alone	40
Food Unites the Material and the Spiritual	41
The Horror Parable	42
 Chapter Eight: And Forgive Us Our Trespasses	 45
Our Trespasses?	45
My Trespasses	47
And What Are My Trespasses?	48

Chapter Nine: As We Forgive Those Who	
Trespass Against Us	51
A Subjective Phenomenon	51
Ever Heard the Story “The Pills of Goodness”?	52
A Chain Reaction between the Vertical and	
the Horizontal	54
An Attitude of the Whole Being	55
Honouring a Confession	55
By Forgiving Others We Do a Favour	
to Ourselves	56
Christ, the Supreme Example of Forgiveness	56
Chapter Ten: And Lead Us Not Into Temptation	61
The Ethico-Moral Dimension: An	
Exegetical Enigma	62
Other Dimensions of Temptation	63
Is There “Glory” in Temptation?	65
From Temptation to Triumph	66
And Finally, “Only Those Who Ride the Horse...”	66
Chapter Eleven: But Deliver Us from Evil	69
An Old Problem	70
And What Do Philosophers Say?	70
What to Do?	73
Evil Makes Us Partners with God	74
Chapter Twelve: For Thine is the Kingdom, and	
the Power, and the Glory, Forever	
and Ever Amen	77
The Human “Mine”	77
The Human “Mine” in the Bible	78
The Human “Mine” in other Faiths	79

The Human “Mine”: Just One Step between Sin and Virtue	79
The Divine “Thine”	80
Bibliography	85
Index of Personal Names	87

CHAPTER ONE

Our Father!

“...but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)

“Our Father!” This is how Jesus taught us to begin his classic prayer. “Our Father!” This is how Jesus taught us to address God. *Our Father!* This is what has become the very title of the Lord’s Prayer.

What does it mean when we address the Almighty, Eternal, Transcendent, and Creator God as “Our Father”? In the first place, can we even dare to call the Most High “Our Father”? Is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings obliged in any manner to become the “father” of sinful humans such as you and I? How can God be *our* father when Christ is his *only* begotten Son? (John 3:16).

But, then, we do not call God “Our Father” by choice. We do so in obedience to Christ’s teaching. *In this manner, therefore, pray: “Our Father...”* (Matthew 6:9).

The fatherhood of God has been acknowledged in at least three great living religions of the world: Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. One great living religion, Islam, repudiates this idea as incompatible with the teaching of its scripture, the Qur’an.

We Christians need offer no apology for calling God “Our Father”. For us it is not merely a matter of doctrinal preference; it is, indeed, the very essence of our faith and existence as Christians.

Even though Judaism professes the idea of God's fatherhood (see Hosea 11:1 for example), this idea seems to have a deeper significance for Christians. This may be indicated from a statistical survey of the concordance. The Old Testament uses the word "father" 612 times, out of which only 12 times (1.96%) does this word refer to God. However in the New Testament, the word "father" has been used 347 times, out of which 242 times (69.74%) it refers to the fatherhood of God.

From Being to Becoming

To call God "Our Father" has deep and far reaching implications. *First*, the moment we approach God as our Father, we secure the courage to draw near the very being of God. God in his very being is holy and the wholly other (cf. Rudolf Otto). No one can see him and live (Exodus 33:20, 19:21; Isaiah 6:5). He is transcendent. He is absolutely beyond. It is this Absolute, Ultimate Being that we approach as *our* father. This relationship gives us amazing inroads into the being of God. It makes us feel *related* to the Absolute. And our relationship with the Absolute no longer remains what it is supposed to *be*—the relationship of the created to the creator, of the vassal to the suzerain, of clay to the potter, of the finite to the infinite, of the mortal to the immortal, of the earthly to the heavenly. No, our relation with the Absolute assumes a new dimension, the very personal dimension, as it were, of the relationship of a child to the parent, a relationship of love, a relationship of "absolute dependence" (cf. Schleiermacher).

This means that the moment we say "Our Father," an amazing and deeply—moving miracle takes place. We no longer remain what we are supposed to *be*—mortal, earthly, created beings. And God no longer remains what he is supposed to *be* - the Wholly Other, Transcendent, Creator. God *becomes* "our father," And we *become* his children. Thus the spiritual prayer "Our Father" sets us on to a spiritual voyage from "being" to "becoming."

This "experience of becoming" opens for us the door to a new privilege. The moment we pray "Our Father" we feel assured of the

privilege of becoming God's children. We realize that we no longer need to approach God with tributes. We no longer need to approach God with anything to *give* him, for we realize that all we have is already his (Psalms 50:9-12); and so we *cannot* really *give* him anything. No. We realize that we can approach God to *ask* of him and *receive* from him *all* that we need.

Once upon a time there was a rich man—the president of a multinational corporation. One day his child went to his office to see him. At the reception the child was stopped and asked whom he wanted to see. The child said he wanted to see the big man. “He is busy and can’t see visitors without previous appointment,” the receptionist told the child. The child replied with carefree confidence: “But he is my *father!*” This is the kind of daring confidence that we receive when we believe in God as “Our Father”.

The moment we address God as “Our Father” we realize our own worth as God's children. We “come to ourselves”—like the prodigal son of old—and cry out in the great ecstasy of discovery: “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father...” (Luke 15:17-18).

The great experience of realizing our worth as God's children brings to mind an entirely new dimension. And that is, that we begin to understand the human fatherhood in an entirely new light. Surely, if God can be so caring to his children, even though he is not obliged to be so, how much more should we care for *our* children? Surely, we are obliged to do so? Psychologists tell us that we cannot teach our children the concept of God's parenthood until and unless we ourselves learn to play our roles effectively as parents.

From “Myness” to “Ourness”

The Lord's Prayer is a corporate petition. It says “*Our* Father” and *not* “My Father.” When we pray this prayer we transcend our individuality and join all God's children (cf Martin Luther King Jr.). We realize that God is *not* merely *my* father. He is indeed *your* father, and *his* father, and *her* father, and *their* father, and *everybody's*

father. That is why we say “*Our Father*.” Now, if God is not only my father, but everybody else’s father, then everybody else is related to me in a very special way. I begin to look at others as God’s children, just as much as I look upon myself as a child of God. So others become my brothers and sisters. The first president of the independent republic of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, once observed that we cannot attain the brotherhood of all humans until and unless we realize the fatherhood of God.

“*Our Father*,” therefore, is the basic ingredient to world peace. Look at what we have done to our humanity! How we have divided humanity into nations, cultures, religions, clans, tribes, classes, and gender! God created a beautiful world; but we have converted it into a number of pigeon holes. We enjoy sitting each alone in his or her own pigeon hole—he pigeon hole of religion, or church, or class, or colour, or doctrine, or culture. We want to relate to God each on our own. Ironically, even when we say “*Our Father*” we say it alone! We want to remain completely oblivious and even grossly intolerant to all others who fall outside our own pigeon-hole. Tribes fight vowing to exterminate one another (see what happened in Rwanda in 1994). Religions compete with one another seeking death for all those who differ, who dissent.

Racial segregation has been practiced in almost all religions. We are indeed a broken humanity. And all this is because we have not once meaningfully prayed “*Our Father*,” because we have not realized that all others who are outside our pigeon hole, are also God’s children, just as much as we presume we are. They are all our brothers and sisters. The moment we earnestly pray “*Our Father*” and sincerely mean it, we become instruments in God’s hands to heal his world, and to restore its beauty and unity to the way God originally created it, so that God’s expectations of this world are realized in the end.

From Theological to Christological

Finally, and this is important, so far what I have said would apply to all human beings in general—Christians and others alike. The

question that I wish to pose now is: What does this prayer mean for us, Christians? So far I have only discussed the theological dimension of this prayer exploring its application to people of all faiths. But what is the *Christological* dimension of this prayer? Where and how does Christ come in all this? What is the special import of this prayer for Christians?

This is where we ask the question: Is God really *our* father? And the answer is: “No. God is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3, etc) Christ is his *only* begotten son (John 3:16). This means that when we say “Our Father” to God who is *not* really our father, we are behaving in a most presumptuous and preposterous manner. But then it is Christ himself who commanded us to approach God as “Our Father”. The deeply significant implication here is that when we say “Our Father” we do so as Christ, on his behalf, in his place. The renowned British lay theologian, C. S. Lewis in his classic, *Mere Christianity*, has called this praying on behalf of, or in Christ, as “pretending”. We do not deserve to call God our father but we pretend to do so, being in Christ. Just as he is the father of Christ so—we pretend—he is our father too. Now, this sounds grossly outrageous. It is only because of God’s gracious love in Christ Jesus that we are permitted, nay, commanded, to commit such an outrage. Look at what Lewis says:

Its [the Lord’s Prayer’s] very first words are *Our Father*: Do you now see what those words mean? They mean quite frankly, that you are putting yourself in the place of a son of God. To put it bluntly, you are *dressing up as Christ*. If you like, you are pretending. Because, of course, the moment you realize what the words mean, you realize that you are not a son of God. You are not a being like the Son of God, whose will and interest are at one with those of the Father: you are a bundle of self-centred fears, hopes, greed, jealousies, and self-conceit, all doomed to death. So that, in a way, this dressing up as Christ is a piece of outrageous cheek. But the odd thing is that He has ordered us to do it. (Lewis 1970, 157)

This means that for us Christians praying to God as “Our Father” is not merely a matter of receiving new privileges from God—for example, the privilege of becoming God’s children. “Our Father” also entails a serious responsibility and challenge for Christians—the challenge of “dressing up as Christ”, as Lewis puts it. This would naturally bring in the inevitable aspect of Christian discipleship—denying ourselves, taking our cross, following Jesus, leaving behind everything else. “Dressing up as Christ” would mean doing everything as Christ did—remaining faithful unto death.

A Trinitarian Mystery?

And finally, for Christians, the prayer “Our Father” presents the mystery of the Trinity in a very special way. Look at what St. Paul wrote in Romans:

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry out “Abba, Father!” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (*Romans 8:15-16*)

Paul here talks of “the spirit of adoption,” in other words, the privilege of *becoming* children of God by nature of adoption and thus sharing in the glory of Christ, the only begotten son. And, on his part, the Son himself says: “I and my father are one” (John 10:30). This mystic communion of the Father and the son has been earlier attested in Isaiah’s messianic prophecy:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given... And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Note how Isaiah in that remarkable text begins his messianic prophecy with the promise of the birth of a Son and concludes that his (the Son’s) name shall be called “Everlasting Father” and “Mighty God” The fatherhood of God encompasses mystically the being of the son

within his own being. The Holy Spirit gives us courage to approach this loving and mysterious (or what Rudolf Otto called *mysterium tremendum*) being, and cry out “Abba Father” by becoming mystically united with the Son (or as C. S. Lewis puts it, “dressing up as Christ”).

Thus, the prayer “Our Father” is God’s potential weapon to restore human society into the family of God’s children and, much more than that, to refresh Christians by a sweet mystic communion with the graces of the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Our Father

CHAPTER TWO

Who Art in Heaven

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth...” (Revelation 21:1)

What do we mean when we pray to God *in heaven*? What is heaven? Where is heaven? Is it a place? Or a state? Or both? Or none? How do we relate the two dualities “Heaven-Earth” and “Heaven-Hell”? Where does earth stand in juxtaposition with heaven and hell? Is earth opposed to heaven and synonymous with hell? Or *vice versa*? What is the meaning of Robert Browning’s assurance “God’s in his heaven/All’s right with the world”? And what is the meaning of Bishop John A.T. Robinson’s outcry: “God is not the grand daddy up there in the sky”? And what is the meaning of the title of Sadhu Sunder Singh’s book, *The Cross is Heaven*?

We cannot afford to pray the Great Prayer, which the Master taught us, in all seriousness and honesty unless and until we ponder these agonizing questions in a spirit of earnestness and humility.

Heaven & Earth or Heaven & Hell?

We might begin with a statistical survey of the frequency of occurrence of such terms as heaven, heavenly, hell, and earth in the Bible. This is based on Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance*.

	OT	NT	BIBLE
Heaven	310	284	594
Heavenly	-	23	23
Heavens	111	19	130
Total	421	326	747
Hell	31	53	84
Earth	796	192	988

The above survey seems to indicate—at least statistically—that the occurrence of the duality of Heaven-Earth in the Bible (747:988) far exceeds that of Heaven-Hell (747:84).

And yet—think about it—our major occupation seems to be with Heaven versus Hell! We seem to have forgotten the earth—God’s good earth—in our preoccupation with heaven and hell. I am reminded of a preacher who once asked one of his parishioners, a lady, how she felt about his sermons. “Pastor,” she replied, “your sermons are really quite instructive. We never knew so much about hell until you came here.” What a paradox! As I said just now, the above statistical survey shows that among heaven, hell and earth, the earth occurs with the highest frequency in the Bible, whereas hell is the least frequent. Yet belief in a post mortem hell appears to dominate the theme of so many sermons.

Hell on Earth?

Behold, how neatly we have divided our world into two mutually exclusive and separate categories of heaven and hell, and that too in a hereafter sense, thereby completely forgetting the earth of the here and now. We tend to live on earth as citizens of a coming heaven, completely oblivious of the hell that we ourselves have created right here on earth.

We have created a hell to which masses are doomed, where eighty percent of world’s resources are monopolized by twenty percent of people, where 80% people are doomed to go on creating heaven for 20% at the cost of creating hell for themselves, where

millions are perishing everyday by starvation and disease, where millions belonging to certain African tribes, American blacks and other marginalized groups are being ruthlessly persecuted and even massacred, where women are regarded as a mere commodity, where toddlers are sexually abused, and grandmothers gang-raped, where the AIDS pandemic is threatening to wipe out the entire human race!

Sure enough, God created “the heaven and the earth”—at least that is what the Book of Genesis tells us. But who created hell—this terrible hell—on God’s good earth? Shall we bow our heads in shame and own up to our responsibility in creating this hell? Or shall we shrug our shoulders in a gesture of indifference, saying: “Well, this hell on earth, as you call it, is the status quo. We do not know who created this hell. It was there in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end! But we are citizens of heaven, and our God is in heaven?”

Does God Need a Home?

The idea that God dwells in heaven is not, in itself, characteristically biblical. Almost all religions and mythologies of the world affirm this truth through their own symbols and analogies. Aldous Huxley, in his book *Heaven and Hell* has seen a psychological dimension to the concept of heaven i.e. this concept fulfils human longing for the unrealized ideal in terms of a strong visual appeal.

In the creation texts of the Bible, heaven does not have any central place. Even the current Christian creeds contain affirmation of belief not in heaven, as such, but in “God, the father almighty maker of heaven and earth.”

Heaven is not eternal, according to the Bible. It is merely a part of the created order. It has a beginning and an end. Along with earth, heaven also is created by God and therefore it shares a common status with earth, the status of createdness, as pointed out by Gerhard von Rad (von Rad 1967, 502-509) and Helmut Traub (Traub 1967, 497-502). In the Old Testament, along with earth, heaven also stands to be judged by Yahweh (Jeremiah 4:23-26, Isaiah 57:6 cf. Job 14:12). In the New Testament also, heaven has a created status like that of

earth. It “passes” like earth. Christ says “till heaven and earth pass away...” (Matthew 5:18). With earth, heaven also stands under the Lordship of God (Matthew 11:25).

In the Old Testament, heaven denotes the cosmic ocean. The Hebrew word for heaven is *shamayim* (literally “heavens”) which contains the root *mayim* meaning a great mass of water. So it appears that in its original Hebrew etymology, heaven is a watery mass. This water is poured on earth through the so called “windows of heaven” when it rains (Genesis 7:11). Now, as we know, water in religious symbolism is associated with life. Hence heaven is a place or a state of life, and life in abundance (cf John 10:10).

Further, in the Old Testament, heaven is paired with the earth in a bilateral relationship. This means that heaven is primary to earth as well as secondary to it. This has been expressed by such combinations as “heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1) and “earth and heaven” (Genesis 2:4b).

In the Old Testament, heaven is not opposed to earth. It is not the spiritual counterpart of the material earth. For that matter, heaven also is described in materialistic terms as a metal strip, a roof top having windows, a curtain, a garment, etc., as shown by T. H. Gaster (Gaster 1962, 551-52).

The Bible tells us that both heaven and earth are perishable, and they will be replaced by a new heaven and new earth (Isaiah. 65:17, 66:22, Revelation 21:1). The proportion of frequency of “hell with heaven” (84:747) suggests that “heaven and earth” (747:988) is a more basic category in the Bible than “heaven and hell”.

Heaven embodies the four dimensions of state, space, time, and moral sense. Of state it represents a sweet harmony between the concrete (as emphasized in the Old Testament) and the abstract (as emphasized in the New Testament). In terms of space and time it appears to be transcending any set spatio-temporal categories in term of “up there after death”. Well, it begins here and now as part of the realized *eschaton*. Were it not so, the Lord’s Prayer would have been meaningless in a here and now context. In terms of its moral dimension, heaven denotes a moral light. God is not caged in a

“Diamond House up there”. He is *up* there and *above* us in a *moral* sense, *not merely* in a physical sense.

Where is Heaven?

Where is heaven? When asked about where her home was, a little girl answered with great confidence, “My home is where my daddy is.” So, in Christian religious experience, “Heaven is where God is.” In the Old Testament we read of the Garden of Eden. I regard that as the perfect imagery of heaven. What constitutes a heaven is the harmony of there—a man, a woman, and God. The first heaven was a garden where a man, a woman, and God used to meet in the cool of the evening. Where those three are in fellowship and harmony, there heaven is. Perhaps that would explain the Persian term *Firdaus* for heaven (lit “Park” or “Garden”). The word “paradise” (a derivative of the Persian *Firdaus*) means the same thing (Garden or Park). On the other hand, the term *Paradise* also seems to have the phonetic connotation of “God’s nearness” (*Para Dei*—by the side of God). This means that heaven is not a place determining the bounds of God’s residence but the fellowship of God. Heaven is where that fellowship happens.

God in Heaven and on Earth

And lastly, God is in heaven and on earth at the same time. Look at the text of the Lord’s Prayer: God is in his heaven - “Our Father who art in heaven...”. God is at the same time also on earth in the person of Jesus Christ who is teaching this prayer.

So, the moment we remember Christ teaching this great prayer to his disciples and say “Our father, who art in heaven ...”, we enter into a joyful mystical experience of togetherness. Togetherness of heaven and earth. Togetherness of God and humankind. Togetherness of God up there and Christ down here.

Our Father

CHAPTER THREE

Hallowed Be

“And one cried unto another, and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’”

(Isaiah 6:3)

Holiness appears to be a rather difficult category to describe. This difficulty arises when we try to conceptualise “holiness” rationally as a doctrine. Rudolf Otto in his classic book, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923), has been duly sensitive to this problem and therefore he has stressed on a non-rational aspect to comprehend the experience of “holiness.”

According to Otto, holiness is not merely a concept. It is also an experience. So the category of holiness is somewhat comparable to the quality of beauty or—if I may use the analogy of Bishop Stephen Neil—to music. To describe this experience of holiness, Rudolf Otto has coined the term *mysterium tremendum*—the mysterious and the awesome experience. (Otto 1923, 12-24).

Holiness in the Bible

In the Bible, holiness has a definite idea embodied in it. Both the Hebrew word *qadosh/qodesh* and the Greek word *hagios* imply more or less the same thing—the idea of *otherness, apartness, separation, distinction*.

James Muilenburg has pointed out several elements which are associated with the concept of holiness in the Hebrew Bible. These

are fire, jealousy, wrath, fear, cleanliness, majesty, unsearchability, incomprehensibility, etc. Muilenburg has examined each of these in detail, furnishing plenty of OT references (Muilenburg 1962, 617 - 25).

The Old Testament employs the Hebrew term for holiness in two major aspects. These are: cultic and ethico-moral. By “cultic holiness” we mean those commandments in the Old Testament (for example, in the Book of Leviticus) which enjoined the ancient Israelites to observe ritual purity in offering sacrifices to God in an acceptable way. By “ethico-moral holiness” we mean those commandments (for example, in the Book of Deuteronomy) which enjoined the ancient Israelites to build right relationships within the society. Otto Procksch has attempted to sketch the history of the concept of holiness in terms of its cultic aspect in the pre-prophetic era, the ethico-moral aspect in the prophetic era, and a synthesis of the two in the post-exilic era (Procksch 1964, 89-97).

In the New Testament, the Greek term for holiness has been used for God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and the Church. The semantic connotation of *hagios* is more or less the same as that of *qadosh* or *qodesh*. However, it appears that in the New Testament the cultic aspect of holiness is almost altogether missing, with the honourable exception of the Book of Revelation. But the Book of Revelation deals with the idea of cultic holiness in a supra-historical, apocalyptic sense. Otherwise, there appears to be a constant judgment on the cultic holiness in the New Testament. Jesus’ severe denunciation of the Pharisees and the Scribes, his declaration of doom over the Temple of Jerusalem, and the curtain of the Temple being torn at Christ’s death settle, once for all, the debate as to where the pulpit and the altar of a Christian church should be. The biblical answer is: anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere! If *we* are the temples of the living God—as St. Paul assures us—if our hearts are the altars, then all these chapels, churches and cathedrals of bricks and mortar, with all their elegant fixtures and furnishings become secondary and should not matter much. I remember an Indian missiologist, Clarence O. Macmillan, remarking in Ambala (Northwest India)—while I was

conducting Bible studies for the SCM National Conference there way back in a series of 1982—that our church architecture, with all its magnificence and splendour, with all its pomp and elegance, is but an expression of Western imperialism.

How can we theologize effectively in poor countries if we have royal churches amidst the poverty of the people? I think Clarence *did* have a point!

The Experience of Holiness

Now, let us consider what the experience of holiness implies. First of all, the experience of the holiness of God implies a judgment. As a paradigmatic set of references, I have opted to take three accounts. These are: the call of Moses (Exodus 3), the call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and the experience of John on Patmos (Revelation 1). Moses, Isaiah, and John, each of these three men were struck with the consuming experience of God's holiness. In the account of the call of Moses, there is judgment on the individual i.e. Pharaoh. In the call of Isaiah there is the judgment on the community—"the men of unclean lips," a people who have eyes, yet do not see, ears yet do not hear, whose hearts are fat and whose ears are heavy (Isaiah 6:9-10). And in the Revelation of John, there is a judgment on the entire human history. As you can appreciate, the Book of Revelation uses a non-historical, mythopoeic type of language to drive home its spiritual truths.

Next to judgment, the experience of the holiness of God implies God's initiative for people's salvation. In the call of Moses, salvation is conceived in terms of political liberation of the community. In Isaiah's call, the salvation-experience begins with the individual's heart, i.e. Isaiah's sanctification, and then moves on to national liberation. In the Book of Revelation, salvation takes place at the cosmic level in terms of the creation of a "New heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

An Otherness with a Difference

We will do well to carefully bear in mind that even though the experience of holiness embodies the idea of *otherness* and separation

etc. yet it is *not* to be taken in terms of social separation, aloofness, white collar chauvinism, if I may put it that way.

I have personally experienced this alienation in my childhood. I was educated in a village primary school in northern India where the fees would be about 25 Cents per month. When I sometimes went to my uncle's home, who was a rich man, to spend vacations with his family, I would go out to play with the neighbouring children. But amidst the galaxy of those radiant, neatly-dressed, convent-educated boys and girls, I would find myself such a total misfit. For them, I was the "other," the foreigner, the unfamiliar. Not a person, but a caricature, maybe! For me they were the "other", the superior, the higher, the different.

I realize now, with pain, that such remains the understanding of the experience of holiness among a large number of Christian brothers and sisters. *We are holy. We are other. We are saved. We are apart. We are different. We are distinct. We live differently. We eat differently. We greet differently. We dress differently. We look different. We are Christians after all!*

Two gentlemen were travelling in a train compartment. One of them was looking at the other distinctive and reserved-looking fellow-traveler. Finally he asked him, "Brother, are you a Christian?" "No", the other man answered, "I am only suffering from influenza." Unfortunately, this is how many Christians would understand the concept of holiness—wearing a long face.

The Christian experience of holiness, however, means not merely social otherness or the maintenance of a long "holy" face. The Christian holiness is God's holiness. And the God whom Christians adore is the God, the mighty Yahweh of the Bible.

The God whom Christians adore is the God who "comes down," if I may use the Old Testament term, the God who gets involved in human history, society, economics, and even politics through the mighty characters of the prophets, the God who *loves* the world, who loves the *world*, who is incarnated as the man Jesus. The God who, in the person of Jesus, touches lepers and allows prostitutes to touch him, the God who, in the person of Jesus, condemns pharisaic

“separationist holiness” and identifies himself as a friend of sinners and the gluttonous and the tax collectors. That is the real experience of holiness: physical involvement and moral otherness—a qualitative distinction.

So when we pray “Hallowed be thy name” we encounter the holiness of God. We realize that God is holy but not a separationist. We are reminded of our commitment to involvement and finally we are challenged to examine ourselves as to whether we merely *profess* holiness by outward form or whether we are morally distinct, having God’s holiness in us. May God make us holy, the way He himself is holy!

Our Father

CHAPTER FOUR

Thy Name

“...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

What's in a name? That is the question we ask when we pray, “Hallowed be thy name.” In the Oriental and African religious traditions, the name has been accorded a great significance. Whether it be a person's name or God's, a name is not merely an identity card or a “name tag”—*so and so*—but the very embodiment of the bearer's being. We read in the Old Testament (Ex.3:16) that Moses had the distinction of receiving the revelation of God's name as Yahweh for the first time. In the religion of Israel, to take the name of God in vain, that is, to mention it too frequently, or to use it to authenticate oaths, is forbidden. *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD, thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.* (Ex. 20:7). In many cultures, the names of husband, father and teacher are sacred, and cannot be pronounced by a wife, a child, or a disciple, respectively. In the Sikh scriptures there is a beautiful statement of Guru Nanak which can be translated as: “Day and night I am lost in the mystic intoxication of the name of God.” According to the Qur'an, Allah has ninety-nine most beautiful names” (*'al-asmâ 'al-h husnâ*).

Why Hallowed *Be* Thy Name?

So what did Christ mean when he taught us to pray “hallowed *be* thy name?” What is the meaning of *be*? It appears that this particular petition may simply be paraphrased as, “O may thy name be hallowed”. Now, what does it imply? Logically it implies that the name of God is *not* hallowed, hence the need for Jesus to teach us to pray “hallowed *be*.”

Is God’s name hallowed or unhallowed? The answer may be suggested by referring back to the idea of biblical theism. The first of the Ten Commandments reads quite like the Islamic Creed—*There is ONE God and none other*. Or are famous verse from the Chhandogya Upanishad of Hinduism, “That which is, is ONE, with no other.” In the Hebrew Bible, this absolute oneness of God implies a sense of jealous exclusiveness. The one thing God would not tolerate, is sharing his exclusive glory with something, or someone, else. In Isaiah 42:8 God says:

I am the LORD, that is my name; and my glory will I give to no other, neither my praise to graven images.

Parallel to this text, we have in the New Testament the exclusive dictum about the oneness of Christ’s name for human salvation:

... for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (*Acts 4:12*)

Having thus established the exclusivistic implication of biblical monotheism, let us now think whether God’s name is really hallowed. Do we give God the glory exclusively due his name? Do we regard Christ as the one and only saviour, redeemer and liberator of the world? Or do we regard Christ as only one among many liberators?

Interestingly, in the conservative quarters of Christendom, the exclusivity of Christ’s saving act is generally compromised by such interpretations as “salvation means individual perfection and not societal revolution.” Sin is deemed to lie in the individual’s spirit

and not in social structures and systems. The Kingdom of God is seen as a matter after death. Now, if Christ is only the saviour of the individual, then who will liberate the oppressed masses? If Christ's blood wipes away only the individual's sin, then whose blood will blot out the sins of the societal systems and structures? If Christ's kingdom is not of this earth, then who will take care of this earth? If salvation is an experience of after death, then who will save us after birth, in this life here and now?

**To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!
(John 6:68)**

To whom shall we look for our total salvation, if not to Christ? What other name is there whereby we must be saved? Those who compartmentalise the work of Christ and the mission of the Church in an exclusive manner, in fact deny Christ Jesus his exclusive glory. They have themselves associated the name of Karl Marx with Jesus Christ. If Christ saves after death, then Marx is the name for this life. If Christ's work of salvation is only the individual's perfection, then Marx's ideology promises societal liberation.

By separating the present from the future, by separating the material from the spiritual, by alienating the body from the soul, the earth from the heaven, the individual from the society, the here-and-now from eternity, we have assumed for ourselves the parochial role of assigning Christ his task and Marx his. We have nicely paved the way for including Marx's name with the name of Jesus.

We as Christians, and as believers in the Bible as the Word of God, cannot afford to trust any other name except that of Jesus. Whether it is the individual's perfection, only the name of Jesus can achieve. If it be the societal revolution, only the name of Jesus can bring it about. If it be the kingdom of God in heaven after death, or right here on earth after birth, only the name of Jesus will establish it. Whether it be the sin of the individual, or the sin underlying

oppressive societal structures, only the name of Jesus and his blood will blot it out.

No Other Name

There is no other name. Let us not share Christ's exclusive glory with anyone if we want to meaningfully pray "Hallowed be thy name." The name of God, the name of Jesus, is the name and the only name to bring about total salvation in this life and hereafter, for the individual and the society. Salvation in all its fullness—only by the name of Jesus, and none other.

CHAPTER FIVE

Thy Kingdom Come

“The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark. 1:15)

The celebrated Scottish scholar of the New Testament, Professor A. M. Hunter, has observed that the entire summary of all the teachings of Jesus can be distilled in just one single phrase—the Kingdom of God (Hunter 1950, 68). This observation of Hunter appears to be true. If we look at Sermon on the Mount, the parables and the miracles of Jesus, his whole life and his death on the Cross, his resurrection and the hope of his coming again, all of these are basically rooted in the idea of the Kingdom of God. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry with these words: “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark. 1:15).

The Idea of the “Kingdom of God”

It is interesting to note that Jesus nowhere attempted to define precisely the Kingdom of God in a technical sense. He always attempted to *interpret* it, mainly through his parables, and sometimes also through some of his miracles. This may lead us to believe that Jesus did not define this concept simply because there *was no need* to define anything. The concept of the Kingdom of God was *already* quite a popular belief in the time of Jesus.

In ancient West Asian religious literature, there are frequent references to the idea of God’s kingship. In the theocratic

governmental system of ancient Mesopotamia, the priests would rule on behalf of “God the King”. In Canaan and Phoenicia also, the god Ba’al was regarded as king. In the Old Testament, we have a very clear indication of the acclamation of Yahweh as King—mainly in two realms.

One realm is *nature*. God is king in the Somain of nature. He is triumphant over the primordial watery chaos symbolized by the raging waters of the Red Sea and the River Jordan (Exodus 14:13-30 and Joshua 3:7-17). God’s mighty triumph over chaos is revealed through the beauty and perfection of creation. God’s kingship thus implies his creatorship (Genesis Chapter 1).

The other realm is *history*. This is an original idea of Israelite theology. God is the king over people, over his chosen ones. According to the Jewish scholar of the Old Testament, M. Tsevet, this societal idea of God’s kingship is more ancient and original than the mythic idea of God being king over other gods in nature. Later on, these two ideas were synthesised. (Tsevet 1976, 515-16).

But it is interesting to note that the phrase “Kingdom of God” is mentioned nowhere in the Old Testament. It appears that this idea originated in the social consciousness of the Jews during the Roman Period (63 BC onwards). It may be argued that the Jews’ repeated experiences of foreign domination and captivity, spanning over five hundred years from the Babylonian captivity, through the Persian and Greek domination until the Roman colonizing of Palestine, could very well have started among them the emergence of a strong hope for an ideal eschatological kingdom in the future. The New Testament scholar, Martin Dibelius, has opined that the Jews started hoping for a future Kingdom of God during the time of the Roman occupation of Palestine (Dibelius 1949, 66, 95).

The Jewish Aspirations about the Kingdom of God

What were the ancient Jewish aspirations about the kingdom of God? The renowned 20th century Jewish scholar of the New Testament, Joseph Klausner, in his celebrated Hebrew work *Jesus of Nazareth* (Klausner 1925, 398-417) has summarized the Kingdom of God

thus: The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of goodness, for “no one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). Klausner further gives the following summary of the Jewish aspirations of the Kingdom of God:

- (a) When sinners have repented of their sins, and pray to Yahweh God, he will send Elijah who will uproot evil and vanquish the evil kings (According to some ancient Jewish writings this work will be done by the Messiah himself).
- (b) Then God will return the kingdom to Israel (cf. Acts 1:6). The Messiah King will sit at the right hand of God and rule with a sceptre. God will judge all tribes of Israel and all the peoples of the earth. Those who do not repent will be thrown into the fire of hell (even though—understandably enough—among such citizens of hell the heathens will outnumber the Jews).
- (c) On the Day of Judgment there will be such a great calamity as there never was since the beginning of creation. This calamity will be in the form of drought, famine, epidemic and war. The son shall assault his own father, and the daughter shall fall upon her own mother. People will forget the law of God. False prophets will rise. One city after another will be destroyed. This will continue till the righteous are fully purified in the fire of suffering.
- (d) After the suffering of the Day of Judgment, the New Age of the Messianic King will begin with the sound of a horn. This will be a golden age of happiness and prosperity. All the captives Jews will be gathered together from every corner of the earth. All heathens will be converted to Judaism and worship the one and the only God. All nations will merge into one. The Messianic King will rule in the land of Israel. The temple of Jerusalem will be rebuilt. People from all races will come running after Zion. There will be a green revolution. Wild animals will no longer harm humans. Social evils like slavery etc. will be abolished forever. The whole human race will become a family, when all will be children of God and live like brothers and sisters.

- (e) In the end there will be the resurrection of the righteous. According to one Jewish tradition, sinners also—having been purified in the fire of hell—will be raised. The righteous will sit in the company of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and other Saints, and the hand of the Messianic King will guard over them.
- (f) Finally, the eternal age will come. In it such mundane acts like eating, drinking, marriage and reproduction will cease. The righteous will sit in the light of God's glory wearing crowns.

It is perhaps against this background of such aspirations that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." New Testament scholars like C. T. Craig (Craig 1951, 145-54) and A. M. Hunter (Hunter 1950) accept a corroborating picture of the Kingdom of God in New Testament thought. In summary, in the New Testament thought, first, the Kingdom of God is eternal (Daniel 4:3) Second, the Kingdom of God is also historical. It is strongly related to earth, here and now.

The Meaning of the Kingdom

It is noteworthy that the word "kingdom" does not adequately convey the semantic implication of the Greek word *basileia* or the Hebrew word *malkut*. The problem with the word *kingdom* appears to be its geo-political connotation, as, for example we mean by the term "The United Kingdom." The word *basileia* can be better rendered as "The Reign of God." It is thus not confined to any set geo-political location.

What did Jesus himself mean by the term "the Kingdom of God"? Scholars have put forward various opinions on this. A. M. Hunter has summarized these opinions in his book *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Hunter 1950, 68). According to the American socialist Bouck White, for the modern man the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of self-respect. An Anglican preacher Dick Shepherd, regards the Kingdom of God as the "Kingdom of Love" (Shepherd emphasizes that in the context of the Kingdom of God the word

“Love” should be spelt with a capital L). According to the Methodist writer George Jackson, the Kingdom of God is a spiritual commonwealth embracing all who do God’s will. In the opinion of Ritschl the Kingdom of God is a humanitarian organization established by the inspiration of God. According to liberal biblical scholars Adolph Harnack and C. J. Cadoux, the Kingdom of God means God’s reign over people and peoples obedience of God.

The above opinions are from the 19th century. Sydney Cave has attempted to give a condensed opinion about the Kingdom saying that the Kingdom of God is a state where man trusts God as Father, and obeys him as King. But Cave warns us that the Kingdom of God is not to be exclusively taken as a mere social movement in the line of popular reforms. Man on his own cannot bring about the Kingdom of God unless God is with him.

However, Jesus’ greatest originality about the interpretation of the Kingdom of God, according to C. H. Dodd, was that Jesus gave the Kingdom a realized eschatological interpretation (Dodd 1935, 49-52). This means that even though, on the one hand, the Kingdom of God is a future reality, on the other hand it has also become a present reality in Jesus. Hence, in Jesus, the enjoyment of the future aspiration of the Kingdom begins right here and right now. “And if I cast out demons by the power of God,” proclaimed Jesus, “then the Kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 11:20)

The Kingdom in Jesus’ Parables

Jesus interpreted the reality of the Kingdom of God through parables, of which there are about eleven. These can be divided into two broad categories. In one category may be grouped together those parables in which, according to Vincent Taylor, the Kingdom of God is depicted as a state of joy. Such parables are those of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44), the precious pearl (Matthew 13:45), the wedding banquet (Matthew 25:1-13), etc (Taylor 1954, 68). The other category appears to be rather bleak. There is a looming judgment with regards to people’s participation in the Kingdom of God. There is a process of selection and rejection. Take, for example, the parables of the wheat growing with weeds (Matthew 13:24), the

dragnet catching both worthy and unworthy fish (Matthew 13:45), and the last minute revision of the guest-list in the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:2). What does this imply? It implies that the Kingdom of God, even though having universal implications, yet has a particular selected dimension. It is not like a free-pass carnival where all can enter and enjoy, just like that. Rather it implies a revolutionary upheaval: a process of purification by fire; a selection-and-rejection process. It is not difficult to identify those who are rejected. The rich cannot enter into the Kingdom of God any more easily than a camel can pass through the eye of a needle (Luke 18:24). Further, the self-proclaimed custodians of the religious hierarchy, the Pharisees, the scribes, and other pseudo-spiritual pretenders, have no hope of inheriting the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God, according to Jesus, belongs to innocent children, to repentant sinners—the publicans, the prostitutes, and the meek of the earth. This is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus did not teach us to pray “O, may we *go* to Thy Kingdom, O God,” but “Thy kingdom come.” The Kingdom of God is not a heavenly destination to be reached beyond death. It is a blessing and a challenge to be received here and now. It is manifested in the liberating miracles of Jesus: the blind see; the deaf hear; the dumb speak; the captives are set free. That which blinds the eyes of the conscience, that which blocks the hearing of God’s silent voice amidst the social, political, and economic turmoil, that which binds the tongue to speak against injustices – that is broken in the Kingdom of God, and we are truly liberated.

Thus, the Kingdom of God is not merely a Kingdom of philanthropy or charity. It is rather a kingdom of thorough overhauling of social, political, and cultural systems. It is a Kingdom where all love each other, and all love God. It includes the material world and it includes the here and now, but it does not exhaust itself either in the material or in the existential. It embraces the totality of life in all its spiritual and material, individual and societal dimensions. Only in such a comprehensive totality does the great petition make its fullest impact: “Thy kingdom come!”

CHAPTER SIX

Thy Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

“... nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42)

The question about the mystery of God’s will has, perhaps, never before hit humankind with so much enigma and pain as it has during the 20th century. The dawn of the 20th century itself spelt the doom of the world. The unexpected sinking of the supposedly invincible Titanic in the Atlantic in 1912, claiming 1,600 innocent lives only served as a harsh wake-up call for the world still slumbering in the cosy optimism of the 19th century. The Titanic tragedy only proved to show that man’s much boasted about scientific and technological innovations were nothing more than a tragic joke. The world had hardly recovered from this rude shock when the First World War broke out in 1914. The formation of the League of Nations in 1919 was unable to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. This culminated in the formation of the United Nations Organization in 1945.

The two World Wars in our century left over 10 million people dead, or maimed. This created a gender imbalance, and caused the economic depression that soon struck in Europe and America, to say nothing of various epidemics that erupted as a result of the breakdown of the health and hygiene systems in War-torn Countries. As if this much suffering for 20th century humanity was not enough, the so

called “Cold War” continued between the Eastern and the Western blocs, with the so-called “Third World” countries serving as a silent battleground for nearly forty years until the collapse of the Eastern bloc in the early 1990’s.

The 20th century was characterized by moral decadence, a general disillusionment with religion, cut-throat competition in the economic market, shameless profiteering, commercialization of religion, and recurring coups, especially in the South. There seemed to be doubt, despair and anxiety everywhere. There is insecurity, violence, and bloodshed in almost every corner of the earth.

Mother Africa continues to shed tears of blood seeing her innocent sons and daughters being slaughtered by their own brothers and sisters in recurring episodes of “ethnic-cleansing.”

Is This God’s Will?

“Is this God’s will?” we ask in great sincerity and with tears. Philosophers of this world will give different answers. Those who believe in predestination or the Islamic doctrine of *Kismet* will say: “Yes, it *had* to happen this way. It was destined to be so. It was ordained by God. Yes it was very much God’s will”. On the other hand, those who believe in something like the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta* (absolute monism) will say: “Well, this whole question of good and evil is irrelevant. This whole sorrow and anxiety is irrelevant. It is due to the unreal, the *maya*, the cosmic illusion. There is *no* duality between good and evil”. The pantheist will assure us: “God is present in everything, everyone, everywhere. He is present both in the oppressor and the oppressed, in the martyr as well as the assassin”. The philosophers of this world will continue with their babble while the innocent humanity will continue to groan in pain, waiting to die.

What is God’s Will?

“What is God’s will?”, we ask again and again. We try looking for the answer in the Lord’s Prayer. And then we begin to see light—light not of knowledge but of truth. The bitter and tragic truth: that

God's will is *not* done on this earth. Mark our Lord's choice of words. He did not teach us to pray: "Father we are thankful to you that your will is done on earth". Rather, contrary to this, he taught us to pray: "Thy will *be* done on earth as it *is* in heaven". The first part of the petition is a prayer for something which is *not* done down here (*be done on earth*). The second part is an assurance of something which is already done up there (*as it is in heaven*).

The Helpless Almighty?

Back in 1972, I had the opportunity of listening to an unforgettable Palm Sunday sermon preached by a great Indian theologian, the Reverend Abdul Haqq, the father of Dr. Aqbar Abdul Haqq, the internationally famous evangelist of the Billy Graham Association.

Mr. Haqq, Sr. interpreted this petition beautifully by an illustration from the famous text of Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." The same Christ—who has the keys to heaven and hell—is standing like a helpless stranger at the door of human heart, knocking. The door is bolted from inside and Jesus does not have the key. The implication here is that even though God's will reigns supreme in the entire universe, yet in the human heart the same will is defeated. The Almighty stands like a powerless stranger outside the man's heart and pleads helplessly: "... if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him ..." (Revelation 3:20).

God's will is done everywhere in the entire cosmos—in the order of nature, in the course of great astronomical bodies everywhere. Not a leaf falls without his will. But it is only in man's heart and the history of humanity where God's will is undone, fails, gets defeated. Jesus, the centre of all creation, stands helpless outside the door of the human heart. Hence the need to pray. "Thy will *be done* on earth as it is in heaven."

The Bad Earth

"Thy will be done on earth" is a prayer which greatly challenges us and commits us to the earth. Heaven is not God's problem. It is the

earth. Earth means the same to God as rebel-threats mean to many so-called “democratically elected” governments in today’s world. The earth is the problem area, the sensitive area, the uncontrollable area, the rebellious area, where God’s will—he ever triumphant, almighty, infallible will of God meets an equally or perhaps more powerful rival. And that is man’s will. The prophets of the Old Testament saw the ancient Israelite history not as Salvation History (To borrow Gerhard von Rad’s favorite) but as sin history which had been corrupted by man’s will.

But history, this sinful, dark history of humanity is dear to God—so dear that he made himself subject to history, yes, even to the process of birth and death in the incarnation of his only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ. God committed himself to history through the birth and death of Jesus Christ. God does not want to take history lightly. God does not want to take earth lightly, otherwise Jesus would not have taught us to pray: “Thy will be done on *earth*.” God does not want to take the world lightly otherwise he would not have “so loved the *world*.” God takes life on this earth most seriously and in greatest love.

Taking History Seriously

Then why do *we* not take history seriously? Why do *we* not take the world seriously? Why do *we* always look to heaven and hereafter? As long as we continue to look upto heaven, (like the Pharisee at prayer), as long as we focus on “spirituality” alone—whatever that means—as long as we remain only eternity-centred, individual-centred, superficially pietistic, as long as each individual continues to engage in earning his or her own “personal salvation,” as long as we pretend to love God without loving our neighbour, the earth will continue to defeat God’s will, and humanity will continue to groan in pangs of death.

Prayers or Shopping Lists?

“Pray without ceasing,” at least that’s what St. Paul reminds us. *Prayer can move mountains*, so we are taught. Yes, all of this is

true. And yet, in today's highly commercial religious industry, prayer has become so distorted that the currently popular commercialized interpretation of the idea of prayer might even surprise Jesus himself! We pray to prepare God to do *our* will, and *not* to prepare *ourselves* to do *his* will, as Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given to you," so Jesus assured us. But unfortunately his disciples—and by implication ourselves—never interrupted the Teacher to ask: "But Master, what it is that you expect us to ask?" We thought we could ask just anything and everything that we might fancy, so long as it is in keeping with our own will. And sure enough, most of our prayers do read like shopping lists, don't they? "Lord, give us this, and give us that, and that too, and that too ...*ad infinitum!*" And when such selfish prayers are not answered, we make our situation even more miserable by thinking that we lack enough faith. But faith, my friends, is not the ability to get from God what *we want*. Faith is the humility to receive from God what *he wants* to give us. That's why St. James observes in no uncertain terms:

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:3)

Now is the time to think: how many times have we truly and sincerely prayed in the spirit of the Author of the Prayer, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "Thy will be done"?

A Supra-Individual Commitment

Doing God's will is a great commitment—"supra-individual," as some have interpreted the approach of the French existentialist movalist Albert Camus. (Peter 1980,) The prayer does not say: "thy will be done in *me*." But it says "on *earth*" It is a great extrovert prayer. It concerns this whole tiny terrestrial ball called earth, rolling in the blood of the innocent. This doomed, dirty, stinking, sinful earth where God's will needs to be done, as Christ taught us to pray "Thy will be done on earth."

“How?,” we chorus in unison. How can we remedy this horrible situation? What can we do? Should we, in the first place, do something or leave it to God? Sometimes leaving things to God becomes a great means of escape. I remember in one committee meeting a rather distasteful item was brought, which needed the committee’s consideration. The Chairman, a veteran Christian and statesman, waved the matter aside saying, “Let us commit this concern to the Lord in prayer and proceed with our agenda.” Do we also leave things like that for God’s consideration minus us?

But this beautiful prayer involves us in something beautiful—something that can effectively remedy the situation if we take this prayer seriously and practically. The clue to the prayer lies in the word “thy.” It is *not* my but *thy*. As long we say: “My will be done: *my will be done in church, in committee meetings, in parliaments, in classrooms, in the market, in business, in the kitchen, in the dining room, in the bedroom, in the library.* As long we say “my will be done,” there are problems.

But this earth can start instantly to change into heaven if we say: “Thy will be done. Thy will O God, and thy will, O neighbour! According to Jesus’ summary of the Law, loving your neighbour is the second most important thing in our life after loving God.

Praying Means Paying

And finally—much as it might sound a bit odd—praying does not just mean receiving, it actually means paying. Jesus Christ, who taught us this beautiful prayer, lived it in the Garden of Gethsemane where the horrible scene of death on the cross loomed large before his eyes. And who will not want to save his or her life? Who will care for someone else’s will when it is a matter of life and death? But Hallelujah! Christ denied his will and prayed to God: “yet not mine but thy will be done.” This prayer cost him dearly—being prepared to drink the cup of death. Are we ready to pay the price and pray: “Thy will be done”? Are we also paying or just praying?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6: 35)

Once upon a time a Sunday school teacher asked her class: “Why do we pray for our daily bread?” “We pray for *daily* bread,” replied a small child, “so that the bread may stay fresh.”

In this petition the focus of the Lord’s Prayer appears, for the first time, to be shifting from the spiritual to the material—from God to bread. For some reason (and it must have been a very good reason) Jesus found it necessary to include a mention of such a mundane thing as bread in this historic prayer he taught to his disciples, and, by implication, to all of us.

But before we move further, it would be good to agree that the term *bread* in this petition does not necessarily connote the specific type of food, which is available at the baker’s. The term bread refers to all staple food whether it is *mkate*, or *chapati*, or rice, or *irio*, or *githeri*, or *matoke*, or *fufu*, or *ugali*, or pasta, or *chow mien*, or any other staple food in a given culture.

What does this petition for bread mean? It means, first of all, that God is concerned about our bread, about our food, about our nourishment—both physical and spiritual. When God handed this beautiful creation to our first parents, Adam and Eve, he said to them: “See, I have given you every herb ... which is on the face of

the earth ... *to you it shall be for food.*" (Genesis 1:29. Italics mine). And when the creation was destroyed by the Flood, God did not give up his food-concern for humankind. "Every moving thing that lives, shall be food for you," he said to Noah, "I have given you all things even as the green herbs." (Genesis 9:3).

God at the Dining Table

The account in Genesis Chapter 18 carries a beautiful story. Without being bogged down by the controversy as to whether we should interpret this rather strange account literally or symbolically, let us enjoy, for a moment, the sheer beauty of the story. Here is God himself, in three persons (could it mean the Trinity?), stopping by to greet a friend of his, called Abraham, and finally sitting down in Abraham's tent to partake of a late lunch of oriental *chapati* and veal stew! Could there be a more moving instance to show God's acknowledgement of the sanctity of the human food-concern?

And what about Moses leading the people of Israel in the wilderness? When the sons and daughters of Israel complained that they were fed up with the monotony of the Manna, and craved for meat, God gave them exactly the food of their choice—delicious fowl-meat, and in plenty! (Numbers 11:31).

And did not God forgive David and his co-warriors when they yielded to the painful rumblings of their hunger, and resorted to eating the holy bread right from the altar of God—the bread that was not allowed for lay-people like David and his friends? (I Samuel 21:1-15. See also Mark 2:25-26).

And what about Jesus himself? When he saw 5,000 men (not to mention women and children) hungry at the end of the day, did he quote to them: "Man shall not live by bread alone"? No, he did not. That verse is for the Devil! (Matthew 4:4). The people of God need to be nourished—not only spiritually, but also physically. And so Jesus performed a miracle to feed over five thousand people with a delicious supper of barley loaves and fish.

And, indeed, the favour that God did to Abraham (Genesis ch. 18), Jesus did to his disciples after his resurrection when he enjoyed

with them a mouth-watering breakfast of broiled fish and honey (Luke 24:41-42; John 21:12). Lunch, supper, and breakfast—and God joining with man in all! Need we say more?

From the Field to the Dining Table

Having noted God's acknowledgement of the human food-concern, let us ask ourselves a question: What images does the concept of food bring to mind?

Long ago I used to think that the only images that the concept of food would bring to my mind were those of cooked dishes, served on the dining table—whether at my home, or in an hotel. But in 1982, while I was attending a preparatory consultation for the World Council of Churches VI Assembly, I had the privilege of participating in a Bible study conducted by Dr. Samuel Amirtham, the then director of the Programme of Theological Education (PTEWCC). “The concept of food,” Dr. Amirtham shared with us, “brings to my mind not only the images of the cooked dishes, but much more.” First of all, he told us, it brought to the mind the image of the farmer, the prime producer of food. And with the farmer came several other images—those of his hard work, his sacrifice, and his plight in the food-market which is governed by its own grim forces: the forces of demand and supply, the forces of competition and inflation, the forces of import and export. Ours is an economy, which makes farmers poor and supermarkets rich. And imagine in our supermarkets, the imported biscuits are in abundance while locally produced sugar and flour in scarcity!

So, you see, by the time it is laid at our dining table in the form of cooked dishes ready for final consumption, food has already made a long journey—right from the farmer's field, through the market, to us. It has passed through the economic processes of production and distribution, of exploiting the farmer, of the middle-man's profiteering, and even of the policies of the political regime.

My question is: When we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” do these images come to our mind also? Has it ever happened in our lives that when we looked at a delicious dish, or a fresh loaf of

bread, or an appetizing *chapati*, or a steaming mound of *ugali*, or a tempting bowl of rice, we began to see *beyond* them, and looked at the real people like us *behind* them? Could we think of the people who worked hard and sacrificed their lives to facilitate the food's journey from the field, through the market, to our dining tables? Could we ever see these masses of people face to face, via food, and pray for them while we said the grace?

Not by Bread Alone

On the other hand, no matter how important food is, food does not have a merely materialistic dimension in the Bible, although, as I said earlier, God does acknowledge the sanctity of that dimension. According to the Bible, food also has a deeper, spiritual dimension. Right from the Garden of Eden the spiritual dimension of food becomes evident when we realize that the primordial spiritual havoc, resulting in the fall of humanity from God's grace, was the consequence of an act of forbidden *eating*.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God sent them Manna, the food from heaven. At face value, Manna seems to be merely another means of physical sustenance of the ancient Israelites during their wilderness wandering. But when we probe its deeper spiritual dimension, Manna seems to be a foreshadowing of Christ himself, the bread of heaven. In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ has confirmed this in telling the Jews of his day:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate Manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread, which comes down from the heaven that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

(John 6:48-51)

It is, perhaps, in this context that Jesus has snubbed Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread by reminding him: "Man shall not live by bread alone." (Matthew 4:4). Man *shall* live by bread,

yes, but certainly *not* by bread *alone*. This simple word “alone” appears to serve as a borderline between Jesus and Marx. At this simple word “alone” Marx ends, and Jesus begins. Marx thought in terms of bread alone, that is, recognizing the materialistic and economic factor as the sole determinant to life, even of spirituality. But Jesus went *beyond* bread, *beyond* the materialistic. For Marx, bread is the end. For Jesus, bread is merely a means to a higher end. And the higher end is humanity’s total salvation. One beautiful thing about biblical theology is that while on the one hand the materialistic dimension is fully celebrated, on the other hand, the material leads to the spiritual. Perhaps this is what Jesus was trying to impress upon his disciples when he told them on the boat: “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.” (Mark 8:15). The disciples failed to grasp the inner meaning of the Master’s words because they were unable to think *beyond* bread. Jesus, being greatly hurt at their materially-fixed minds, exclaimed: “How is it you do not understand?” (Mark 8: 21). How is it that we too do not understand? How is it that many times our prayers also end at bread, at our materialistic needs? How is it that we give tithes so that we may receive tenfold materialistic blessings of what we gave, and not to thank God for what we have already received from him? How is it that when we pray “Give us this day our daily bread” we think of nothing but physical food? How is it that we do not pray to receive Jesus himself who is the Bread of Life? How is it, indeed?

Food Unites the Material and the Spiritual

Finally, food unites within itself the material and the spiritual dimensions of life. Of the several instances in the Bible which indicate this, I shall mention three. First of all, look at the Hebrew festival of the Passover. We read about the institution of this festival in Exodus Ch. 12. The Passover is two things at the same time. On the one hand, it is a simple (although apparently sumptuous) meal of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and roast lamb, eaten in a hurry. But on the other hand, it signifies a deep spiritual experience—the experience of deliverance, of liberation from the oppressive forces,

of salvation through the mighty works of Yahweh. It is a meal of testimony to God's grace and mercy, and of the confession of man's utter helplessness to save himself.

Second, in the New Testament, we have the sacrament of the Eucharist. Again, the Eucharistic sacrament, on the one hand, is merely a meal, even a meager meal—just a crumb of bread, and a sip of wine. But on the other hand, it signifies the deepest moment in Christian spiritual experience. It signifies partaking of the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ, and thus sharing in his vicarious suffering and salvific sacrifice. Well, as we know, Christian libraries are replete with volumes on the interpretation and significance of the Eucharist, and so I need not belabour this point anymore.

The third instance is eschatological. Jesus envisaged the Kingdom of God in terms of a banquet where Christ's true disciples will dine with him (Luke 22:29-30). Even in the Book of Revelation, Jesus says that he stands and knocks at the door (of the human heart?) waiting for an invitation to come in and *dine* (Revelation 3:20).

Give us this day our daily bread. This is not merely a prayer. It is an experience—an experience of unity between heaven and earth, between the material and the spiritual, between God and man.

The Horror Parable

The same Jesus who taught us this prayer, also told us a memorable eschatological parable of sheep and goats. In this rather scary parable, at least once Jesus has answered the cardinal question of who will go to heaven, and who won't. Heaven is for those who saw Jesus *hungry* ... and gave him *food* ..., and hell is for those who failed in this duty (Matthew 25:35, 43). And how can we give food (and drink, and clothes, and shelter, and all other care) to Jesus? "Assuredly, I say to you," declares Jesus, "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Conversely, failure to take care of these least, these oppressed groups, is failure to serve Jesus (Matthew 25:40, 46).

Friends, let us pause, and ask ourselves: Shall we be able to hear from our Lord, "I was hungry and you gave me food ... Come,

you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the creation” (Matthew 25: 34, 35)? Or, despite our sanctimonious claims, will Jesus reject us in the end, and charge us with something like what follows?

I was hungry and you said, “The poor are always with us.”

I was hungry, and you appointed a committee.

I was hungry, and you sent a man to the moon.

I was hungry, and you said, “So am I.”

I was hungry, and you developed laser-guided missiles.

I was hungry, and you took pride in your Cray computers.

I was hungry and you blamed it all on the communists.

I was hungry, and you said, “Sorry, old chap, but I am rushing to attend the global hunger summit.”

I was hungry and you were too busy in your propaganda against Western imperialism.

I was hungry, and you said, “Work hard, brother! You won’t be hungry next time.”

I was hungry, and you said, “How come you entered here without an appointment?”

I was hungry, and you said, “Man shall not live by bread alone.”

Lord, make us hungry for your flesh, which is the Word of God.
And make us thirsty for the living water so that we never be thirsty again.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Our Father

CHAPTER EIGHT

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”
(Psalm 32:1)

In the great experience of the Lord’s Prayer we have looked to God in different ways. We have looked to Him as our Parent, as the One in Heaven, as the Holy one, as One whose will is done in Heaven but not on earth, and as the Giver of our daily bread. Thus we have looked at ourselves in the process of looking to God.

Now we look at ourselves in an entirely new perspective, a distinct Christian perspective, when we pray “And forgive us our trespasses.” Indeed, this petition brings a great Christian turn in the Prayer. This position has nothing in common with the monistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and has little in common with the Islamic idea of the justice of God. This petition takes two great truths for granted: *One*, we are all trespassers, and *two*, that God forgives our trespasses. Someone has beautifully summarized these dual aspects as follows:

*God always gives and forgives,
Man always gets and forgets.*

***Our* Trespasses?**

In the preceding communitarian vein, the prayer moves on to the communal confession of sin (*our* trespasses). Now, what is the meaning of “our”? We have not participated in an orgy! We have

each committed our own individual sins and trespasses. Why then should we pray “*our* trespasses”?

“Why not,” God wonders. By all means. The prayer *has* to be “our trespasses,” because God created a universe, and not a number of pigeon-holes, where each individual sits completely unrelated to others and only related to God. The reality of life lies in the continuum of life’s relationships. Indeed we live and move and have our being amidst unbreakable relationships! Amidst such a relational situation, sin takes on strong sociological dimensions. Here it is *not* my sins but *our* sins. Can there really be a place for comparisons in Christian’s life: *I am only worse than a few, but better than many, praise the Lord?* No! In all fairness I must participate in the great experience of “ourness.” The theft, adultery, rape, falsehood, murder, exploitation, and oppression committed by my brother or sister is very much my own sin. There is absolutely no place in Christian experience to give thanks to God for the sins that I have *not* committed as long as others have committed them. Do you remember Jesus told his disciples in Luke 18:10-13 that such an individual chauvinist prayer of the Pharisee was expressly rejected by God. Jesus heard this self-proclaimed “saved” man praying: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth [tithe] of all I get.” (Luke 18:11). Oh, what pitiable individual chauvinism!

What deplorable pietistic pride which consumes us sometimes! Such a proud prayer is not likely to be accepted by God (Luke 18:14).

I ask a question of all of you reading this book, including myself (Although, at this moment, I am not reading this book. I am writing it!): “Did we even once pray to God saying “God, forgive me for the sins that Hitler and Stalin and Idi Amin committed. Forgive me for the genocide in Cambodia and Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Forgive me for the bombings in Oklahoma and Nairobi. Forgive me for the Post Election Violence in Kenya. God, these are not merely other people’s sins. These sins are mine as well, for I am related to other people in your great plan of creation”? Maybe this kind of prayer would have been most Christian, indeed a most Christlike prayer!

My friends, in as much as we are spiritually, socially and materially related to each other, our sins or virtues are not at all his, hers, mine, yours, or theirs. They are *ours*. Hence the need to pray to God: “Forgive us *our* trespasses.” God’s love demands that we should not only seek forgiveness for others’ sins, but also offer ourselves to bear their punishment. This is what Jesus did. He *bore* our sins. Yes, *he* bore *our* sins! What does it mean? It simply means that the sins for which Jesus died on the Cross were *not* his sins. They were *our* sins. Jesus had virtually nothing to do with those sins. But, in fulfillment of God’s love for us, Christ allowed, nay, joyfully accepted, *our* sins to become *his* sins. This is what Christ did on the Cross (Hebrews 9:28). This is what we mean when we say, “He bore our sins.” And, indeed, this is what we are called upon to do if we claim to “love the Lord”. The Bible calls upon us to “bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2).

My Trespasses

Lastly, even though the Lord’s Prayer is silent about it, there is a definite place in Christian experience for self-examination. Yes. There *is* a place to search our own hearts and pray in tears like David:

“For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3)

Or like Isaiah:

“Woe is me! I am ruined!
For I am a man of unclean lips,
and I live among people of unclean lips,
and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:5)

Or like Peter:

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8)

Or like the Publican:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” (Luke 18:13)

Indeed, there is an irreplaceable place for self-examination in the Christian Experience. Leslie Weatherhead, the famous Methodist psychotherapist and counselor from England, has elaborated the virtues of confession for psychotherapeutic purposes. But is as much needed for theological and sociological purposes.

Self examination and confession is the only arena in Christian experience which necessitates and legitimizes the focus on the individual. When we look at ourselves—each looking at his or her own self, and realizing the great emptiness that lies within, realizing the barriers that this sinful self has created between the individual and his or her God—we feel the need for self-denial. We recall our Lord’s clear exhortation that we need to deny this self, this sinful self, if we wish to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). And so it becomes expedient that we pray “Forgive *me my* trespasses.”

And What Are *My* Trespasses?

My trespasses are

That I failed to see that others also were created in God’s image as much as I was,

That I conceived life in terms of compartmentalized pigeonholes, and

That I failed to relate myself properly to others.

My greatest trespass is that I tried to confine sin and virtue, heaven and hell, solely within my individual context and forgot that others were involved with me.

Thus, in the great dialectic of the Lord's Prayer, *our* sins lead us to focus on *my* sins, and *my* sins lead us to focus on *our* sins.

Lets Confess Our Sins

Friends, let us approach God both as individuals as well as a society and lay before him the sinful social structures and systems that we, for our individual benefit, have created, and pray:

Forgive us our trespasses.

Let us approach God as a nation, and lay before him our failure to share life with all, in all its fullness, and pray:

Forgive us our trespasses.

Let us approach God as the Christian Church and confess our unwillingness and failure in bringing God's Kingdom on earth. Let us confess our sin, as the Church of Christ, in conforming our ways to the ways of the world, and pray:

Forgive us our trespasses.

Finally, let us confess the sad reality that we suffer from the very same evils within the Church that we denounce in the society outside, and pray:

Forgive us our trespasses.

Our Father

CHAPTER NINE

As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

“... forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)

No joy could be greater than the joy of forgiving and being forgiven. The great and unsurpassable experience of forgiveness ushers relationships into new realms. The occasions of forgiveness shine like glorious milestones in the journeys of relationships.

More than shining milestones, the occasions of forgiveness become the tombs of old enmities and the wombs of new friendships. With joy overflowing, hearts throbbing with God’s love, and the love of our fellow human-beings, do we report to God: “...as we forgive those who trespass against us.” I devote this chapter to a reflection on this sweet endowment with which you and I have been blessed—the gift of giving and receiving forgiveness.

A Subjective Phenomenon

First of all, forgiveness, at the human level, is a subjective phenomenon. Incidentally, and unfortunately so, this whole concept of forgiveness is one that has been greatly distorted among many Christians. It has been plucked out of its subjective soil and conventionally re-planted in an objective seedbed. By “subjective” I mean that if I have committed a fault, then *I* must realize it and beg

for forgiveness, and if the other person has committed a fault, then I must forgive him or her without expecting or extracting any apology from that person. But, sadly speaking, this whole ideal of forgiveness has been completely distorted into an objective mould. So, when it is *my* fault, I do not care to apologize but expect the *other person*, the grieved one, to forgive *me* as if it is my Christian birthright, and his or her Christian duty. But when the other person has wronged against me then *I* expect *him* or *her* to apologize to *me* in all Christian humility and in a nice Christian manner. This is the objective distortion of the subjective phenomenon of forgiveness.

Ever Heard the Story “The Pills of Goodness”?

To seek forgiveness and to give forgiveness is not an easy thing. It is a narrow way, a kind of a Cross, which we must bear. Becoming good enough to beg for forgiveness is a greatly disadvantageous bargain. This point has been very well illustrated in the Hindi story entitled “The Pills of Goodness” by the famous atheist writer in Urdu and Hindi, Krishan Chander. Here is the story:

One fine morning, a happy husband and wife are basking on their lawn, when suddenly they feel the presence of a third being, a stranger. The couple demand to know what brings him there, the intruder politely explains that he is a sales representative from a drugs company, and has been sent on a mission to introduce the company’s latest product to the potential consumers’ market. The product is the pills of goodness. Take a pill and you will become a good person. You will realize and confess your sins before the grieved party. You will beg for forgiveness. The salesman insists the couple try a free sample and see its effects.

Well, the husband and the wife each swallow one of the tiny sample pills. And from then onwards, life no longer remains the same. They both confess their hitherto secret sins to one another. The wife sobs and confesses to her husband how she has made a fool of him by making him pay

the entire expenses for the complete education of her three younger sisters.

At this the husband bursts into tears and confesses to his wife: "Darling, don't mention it. Yes, it is true that I paid for the education of your three younger sisters, but I confess that there was a far deeper understanding between them and me than you can ever imagine. In fact, the sweet reward of my relationships with your sisters was worth every cent that I spent on their education."

The wife then falls at the husband's feet and says: "I know my dear, I know. In fact, I have suspected it all along. And I must say that I felt so jealous of this whole dirty business that many times I was tempted with the idea of poisoning your food. And, sweetheart, once I actually did lace your food with a generous amount of rat-poison before sending it to your office. What beats me is how you managed to survive! Dearest, I am not worthy to be called your wife."

The husband cries out, in floods of tears, and throws himself at the wife's feet and says: "I know dearest, about that poisoned food of yours, as I had been suspecting you from the beginning. I gave a sample of that food to a cat in the office and it died. I was so enraged that I loaded my pistol to kill you that very night, but later thought better of it. O, my dear sweet wife, I am not worthy to be called your husband."

Now, suddenly, they feel a strange change in themselves. They discover, to their horror and embarrassment, that they are lying prostrate on the ground before one another in total and primitive submission, and the salesman is still standing by their side. The effect of the pills of goodness is over, and they are the same old beings. Only now they have new and devastating knowledge about each other! They chase the salesman away. The pills of goodness, in course of time, attain great notoriety as people are publicly confessing their sins under the drug's effect and

later on, upon realizing the embarrassing and horrible truth, are being driven to suicide. The pills of goodness have turned the world upside down! High-profile appointments are ending in resignations. Marriages are ending in divorce. Lives are ending in deaths. Whole parliaments end up dissolving themselves on realizing, under the effects of the pills of goodness, their national debauchery. The pills of goodness have wreaked havoc on earth. Something must be done before these pills destroy the whole planet. The government acts swiftly and decisively, and slaps a strict ban on the production, marketing, possession, discussion, and even imagination of the pills of goodness!

The story ends with the drug company hitting on a grand solution to revive the sale of the pills of goodness. The company has now produced an antidote—the pills of evil. So now all your problems will be solved if you yourself take the pills of evil and give the pills of goodness to others!

My friends, this is how we Christians understand the concept of forgiveness—like the pill of goodness. Forgiveness is meant for others and not for us.

A Chain Reaction between the Vertical and the Horizontal

Secondly, the phenomenon of forgiveness involves a chain reaction between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of life. This is what is implied in the petition in the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Here the two aspects, or facets of forgiveness i.e. the divine and the human, being interdependent, hinge one upon the other. Because we forgive those who trespasses against us, we may expect forgiveness from God for our trespasses. Conversely, once we receive forgiveness from God, we are obliged to forgive others, as was illustrated in Jesus by the parable of the debtor servant in Matthew 18:23 - 35. The servant whose debt has been pardoned by his master is obligated to pardon his debtor servant in return; failing which, he is thrown behind bars.

Forgiveness is, thus, something which continues between God and man. It entails a perpetual continuity. When Peter asked Jesus how many times one is expected to forgive, our Lord tried to impress upon him that there are no mathematical limits to forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22).

God's forgiveness relates to man's forgiveness. "If you forgive men their trespasses," said Jesus, "your heavenly father also will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). The returning prodigal son prayed to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:21). To trespass against your earthly father is equal to trespassing against your Heavenly Father.

An Attitude of the Whole Being

Thirdly, forgiveness is an attitude of the whole being, and not merely of emotions. It does not exhaust itself in mere hysterical outbursts of weeping and wailing, the touching of feet, the emotional embracing, and giving each other a bath of tears. Such a hysterical experience of forgiveness is very temporary and vanishes with the subsiding of the emotional storm, leaving the individuals concerned at the *status quo*, perhaps worse than before. Forgiveness, rather, involves an attitude of the entire personality. It involves an act of will under a cool, calculating, and sober decision of the mind.

Honouring a Confession

Fourthly, forgiveness means honouring a confession. It asks no further questions. It does not care whether the confession is genuine or fake. It does not count and calculate as to how many times the same person has been forgiven for the same offence. True forgiveness honours a confession and finishes the matter then and there.

Many years ago, while I was a high school kid, I was staying in a hostel. Being a child of my age, I too was a naughty boy, for some offence I was expelled from the hostel. This experience completely shattered me. More than undergoing the much feared

public caning by the warden, I was afraid of facing my father, a pastor, who had been taking great pains to support my education somehow.

One afternoon the warden came to my dormitory brandishing his fearsome cane, and beckoned me to follow him to his office. Like a sheep going to be slaughtered, I followed him, preparing my nerves for the pain and my skin to be ripped off by the caning. Entering the warden's office I had the greatest shock and horror of my life. I found myself looking face to face at my father who had been summoned to take me home.

I felt as if I had already been beaten by a thousand canes on my naked skin. I felt as if the heavens had fallen upon me and the earth had opened her mouth to swallow me. I tried to look at my father's face. He was not looking angry at all, but he was looking deeply tired and worn out. I stared at his feet and mumbled "Daddy, please forgive me." My father held my hand in his with loving tenderness and said to me: "I have forgiven you, my child. Come, I will help you pack up. But before we leave, ask your warden also to forgive you." It was a Sunday. We attended the church service and then we left for home by train.

Only at home while we were relaxing, did Father try to impress upon me that inasmuch as he had immediately honoured my confession, and forgiven me, I should also honour his forgiveness and live up to it.

Now that my father is no more, all I can say is that the experience of forgiveness that he allowed me to have nearly forty years ago, has become for me the greatest illustration to comprehend my being forgiven by God in Christ.

By Forgiving Others We Do a Favour to *Ourselves*

Fifthly, and this is very important to remember, by forgiving others we do no one any favour. We do a great favour only to ourselves! When someone hurts us, the experience has the devastating effect on us in that in a way it alienates us from ourselves. We begin to lose confidence in ourselves. We are suddenly struck with a nagging feeling

of being weak, being helpless, being powerless. We begin to feel that our tormentor is the conqueror, and we are the vanquished. The worst part is that most probably we feel much more defeated than our tormentor feels triumphant!

In those traumatizing moments when we torture ourselves by imagining how happy our tormentor might be feeling at our misery, we fail to appreciate that in those very moments our tormentor might not even be thinking of us! Or, it is quite possible, that he (or she) might even have forgotten all about us and the evil thing he or she did to us. Or, perhaps, at that very moment our tormentor might himself (or herself) have been involved in an accident, or some other kind of tragedy, or might even be breathing his or her last, or might even be actually dead! Or, it is also quite possible that in those very moments our tormentor might have come to his (or her) senses, and realized his or her fault, but—being the kind of person that he or she is—will never care to apologize to us.

And so, here we are—eternally tormented, tortured, devastated, vanquished, burning in the eternal fire of hatred and revenge, wanting to return harm for harm, hurt for hurt—maybe sevenfold. And in doing so, we imagine that we would be doing ourselves a favour, and bringing peace to our hearts and a healing balm to our bruised souls! But would it really work? Would seeing our tormentor in pain really help to reduce any of ours? Would seeing our tormentor humbled help very much to restore any of our own lost dignity? Just think about it.

On the other hand, if we decide to unconditionally forgive our tormentors, and “pray for them that persecute us” (Matthew 5:44), we shall be the gainers. It will help us to be reconciled with ourselves. It will help us to overcome our sense of defeat and thus defeat the very purpose of our tormentors! It will infuse us with a new sense of meaning and purpose in life, shifting the focus of our vision from petty concerns to more profitable things.

The world-renowned management consultant, Stephen Covey, in his classic *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, informs us of the famous psychiatrist Viktor Henkl who spent several years

of his life in a German concentration camp during the Second World War. The inhuman tortures meted out by the Nazi regime on its captives are by now too well-known to merit any elaboration here. Remember the movie *Escape from Sobibor*? Ok, let me continue telling you the story of Henkl. Here was this man in great pain, both physical and spiritual, being nearly broken from the torture of his Nazi tormentors. What saved him from completely breaking down was his reflections in his cell during a certain night.

On that night, Viktor Henkl realized that hating his tormentors was not his only option. In fact he realized that the more he hated his persecutors, the more enslaved he became to his own doomed sense of hatred and revenge-seeking. He realized that even though in captivity, he did have the option to be free—in his soul—and in that freedom to forgive his Nazi captors.

For Viktor Henkl this was the *Nirvana*, the Great Enlightenment. He forgave his tormentors, and life no longer remained the same for this hitherto nearly broken man. He discovered new sources of power within himself. He experienced a sense of peace and joy he had never known before. He even became able to befriend many of his Nazi captors. The bitterness of an outwardly captive life turned into the sweetness of an inward freedom. Henkl lived henceforth a happy life amidst the miseries of the Nazi concentration camp, and he lived long enough to see his freedom. After the War was over, Henkl was able to start a new life, as a free man, as a counsellor. Do you know that the founding father of the famous contemporary management principle, known as “Proactivity”, is none other than Viktor Henkl himself? He is also the founding father of the psychotherapeutic principle known as “Logotherapy.”

Christ, the Supreme Example of Forgiveness

Lastly, Jesus Christ is the supreme example of forgiveness. He forgave without reservation. He forgave without extracting apologies and confessions from the offenders. Consider, for example, his prayer on the Cross: “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). And when a confession was submitted, like that

of the bandit on the cross, Jesus honoured the confession fully and forgave him forthwith with an assurance of receiving him into Paradise “Today.” (Luke 23:43).

Jesus went about sharing with humanity the joy of having a guilt-free conscience, a forgiven personality, and a forgiving vocation which is conducive to physical, mental and spiritual well-being. To persons laden with a guilty conscience, so much so that their guilt manifested itself in physical and mental maladies, Jesus assured: “Son” (or “Daughter”), your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5-11). This imparting of forgiveness, for the well-being of human life, was of utmost importance to Jesus—even more important than the observance of the Sabbath. (Luke 13:15-16).

The above might help us to appreciate why Jesus included those significant words in his immortal Prayer: “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Our Father

CHAPTER TEN

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (I Corinthians 10:13)

Let me begin by telling you a story from the Hindu scriptures. This is the story of Vishwamitra (pronounced as *Vish-wa-mitr*), one of the greatest sages ever born on earth. This great man once caused a terrible crisis in heaven by reaching those spiritual heights in his celibate austerity and single-minded meditation (*tapasya*) which are beyond the reach of earthly mortals. The gods above were greatly alarmed and finally decided to destroy the great *rishi*'s (sage's) *tapasya* by violating his celibacy, which was the foundation-stone of his spiritual strength, (as hair was the foundation-stone of Samson's physical strength). Menaka, the heavenly nymph, the *apsara*, with irresistible beauty, was charged with the mission. She comes down to earth, seduces the *rishi* into marrying her, and living the life of an ordinary married man (*grihstha*). A daughter is born to them. And then, one fine morning, Menaka, having already accomplished her mission, ascends back into heaven, taking her daughter with her, and leaving behind a bitter and bewailing Vishwamitra who has now fallen back to the ordinary status of earthly mortals.

Such, it seems, is the prevailing understanding of the idea of temptation. This idea is also present in Pauline thought and in monastic Christianity. Such an understanding of “temptation” implies the following pre-suppositions:

- that the idea of temptation is predominantly restricted to the ethico-moral realm,
- that within the ethico-moral realm, it further crystallizes in the area of human sexuality,
- that woman, being regarded as the eternal temptress, is subjected to severe judgment,
- that celibacy is regarded as the best condition of life, and marriage as only the second best (1 Cor.7:1-9),
- and lastly, that moral categories are absolute and not relative as suggested by the modern proponents of neo-morality in our times—Joseph Fletcher, Harvey Cox, R. Bultmann, Bishop John A. T. Robinson, Bertrand Russell and others.

The Ethico-Moral Dimension: An Exegetical Enigma

Now, if this is what we mean by temptation—this pearly-gate to sin, this snare of the evil, this crazy urge to act out our immoral fantasies, this allurements into the trap of sin against our wishes, this falling from the godly ideals, or this “moral adventure,” as Kenneth Slack calls it—then we are faced with the perplexing exegetical question: What does this petition imply? Why should we pray to *God* not to *lead* us into temptation? Does it mean that God really “leads” you and me into temptation, so that we are praying to him not to do what he normally does? Are we negotiating with the Almighty to grant us some kind of a discount through this petition? Can God be a party to enticing us into sinning? Such questions have been earnestly raised by such serious New Testament scholars as Joachim Jeremias, Kenneth Slack, William Barclay, and others. But before these

academic luminaries, there was a simple and earnest man who raised this question in all sincerity and seriousness. I hope we remember his name. It was none other than St. James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. James has clearly declared in his epistle:

Let no one say when he is tempted,
 “I am tempted by God;” for God cannot be tempted with evil and
 he himself tempts no one” (James 1:3).

This exegetical crisis necessitates a multi-dimensional probing into the meaning of the biblical idea of temptation and its exhaustive interpretation.

I have already pointed out the popular emphasis laid on the ethico-moral dimension of the idea of temptation. But this does not seem to be the essential case here in our present petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation,” as I pointed out above, for exegetical reasons.

Other Dimensions of Temptation

This leads us to consider other dimensions of temptation. Let me begin with what I would prefer to call the “*epistemological*” dimension. But let me caution you here that by “epistemological” I do not mean a philosophical theory (relating to knowledge), but a theological concept (relating to faith, in New Testament Greek *pistis*).

In the Hebrew Bible, the original word for temptation is *massa*, a noun form derived from the verb *nasa*. The verb *nasa* means: “to put the test”, and its various derivatives have almost always been used in the sense of testing God (Exodus 17:7, Numbers 14:22, Deuteronomy 6:16, Psalms 95:9, 106:14 etc.). It is noteworthy that the King James Version has always rendered various derivatives of the verb *nasa* in these texts as “*tempting* God”.

One paradigmatic text could be Ex 17:7 where the aetiology of the place called *Massah* has been explained. The Israelites “tested” the LORD at this place in the wilderness. In other words, they doubted his omnipotence. They compromised their faith in God’s caring love

for them with rational experimentation. This is how the Israelites seem to have “tempted” God at a place called *Massah* in the wilderness.

A reversal of this motif is seen in the narrative of Genesis chapter 22, where God “tempts” (or tests) man (Abraham) in terms of testing his faith by asking him to sacrifice his *only* son Isaac for God. A derivative of the same verb *nasa* has been used in Genesis 22:1 also.

This leads us to another dimension, i.e. the *existential dimension*, of temptation. By “existential” I mean the life of an individual human being and how temptation affects an individual in his or her own existence. Temptation, in an existential sense, is to be conceived in terms of a fire-ordeal, a test, a painful trial, a sort of calamity which completely shakes up our being and disrupts our existence. The Hebrew noun *massa*, and the verb *nasa* in this sense of temptation have been used in many places in the Hebrew Bible, for example, Psalms. 95:8, Deuteronomy 7:19, 29:3 etc. The King James Version renders all these occurrences of *massa/nasa* (and their various derivatives) as “temptation.” In the New Testament, such connotation of the idea of temptation are implied in the temptation of Jesus, both in the wilderness as well as in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. When it comes to understanding temptation in terms of trials and ordeals, a question arises about the temporal identity of the experience of the ordeal. Is the ordeal a matter of the present, or does it point towards the future, heading towards a final consummation after the final curtain is dropped on history?

This question leads us to another dimension of temptation which I call the *eschatological dimension*. Temptation means our final testing and trial in the *eschaton* (the end of the age), the final era of the global depravity of faith, the prevailing of the anti-Christ over all, and the urge and even seeming necessity to deny Christ and turn to apostasy. Scholars like Joachim Jeremias, W.F. Albright, and C. S. Mann insist that it is against this eschatological temptation that protection and prevention is sought in the Lord’s Prayer petition: “Lead us not into temptation.”

Is There “Glory” in Temptation?

All the above suggests the universality and inevitability of temptation. The painful dilemma about temptation is that we are not always sure whether we willfully decide to fall into temptation, or we find ourselves fallen into it, much against our freedom of choice with which God has endowed us. On the other hand, temptation, in terms of God testing our faith through a fire-ordeal, is his sole prerogative, and we must accept it in all possible humility.

Joachim Jeremias, in his thought-provoking study on the Lord's Prayer has quoted an extra canonical saying of Jesus:

No one can obtain the kingdom of heaven who has not passed through temptation. (Jeremias 1967, 105)

William Barclay summarizes the universality of temptation thus:

Temptation is not designed to make us fall. Temptation is designed to make us stronger and better than other men and women. Temptation is not designed to make us sinners. It is designed to make us good. We may fail in the test; but we are not meant to. We are meant to emerge stronger and finer. In one sense temptation is not so much the *penalty* of being a man; It is the *glory* of being a man. (Barclay 1964, 118-19)

Kenneth Slack has quoted Marcus Dodd as saying:

Temptation is our only opportunity for growth—a very commonplace truth, but lying at the root of our whole condition in this world. (Slack 1973, 104)

It appears that these scholars are not ascribing glory to the experience of temptation as they might seem to be doing. Rather they seem to be pointing towards the triumph out of it, the victory, the believer's glorious emergence out of the gloom of temptation—like a lotus emerging spotless out of mire!

That is why Jeremias has noted that this prayer does not ask for protection *from* temptation but preservation *in* temptation. (Jeremias 1967, 105)

From Temptation to Triumph

We will do well to bear in mind that when these scholars talk of the universality of temptation, and the triumphant emergence out of it, they do not so much confine themselves to the ethico-moral dimension of temptation which I mentioned in the opening story of this chapter (which does not seem to be the central motif in this petition, anyway). Rather, they are referring to the epistemological, existential and eschatological dimensions of temptation. Yes, the temptation to give up our faith in God and embrace apostasy, to lay our hand on the plough and then turn back, is universal. The temptation to avoid bitter responsibilities is very real, as even Christ also heard himself praying: “Father, if possible remove this cup from me.” But God’s grace is always there to give us strength. It is perhaps in this sense that Barclay talks of the “glory” of temptation. In our context we can say: “Failures, frustrations, anxieties, disillusionment, and defeats are not meant to finish us off. They are meant to make us strong in life.”

And Finally, “Only Those Who Ride the Horse...”

One of my favourite couplets from Urdu poetry is as follows:

Only those who ride the horse, fall from the horse,
Toddlers, who yet crawl on their knees, know nothing of falling!

It seems that we have—perhaps a bit unrealistically—too much romanticized the triumphalistic approach to temptation. But—let us look in the Bible—who was truly triumphant in temptation except Joseph of the Old Testament, and Jesus of the New? But there is also a Moses, and a David, a Solomon, and even a Peter, God’s chosen people, who are portrayed not as triumphant angels but as succumbing humans. Just how much bitterness and tears are involved

in the terrible experience of getting in and out of temptation! Humans are created weak and vulnerable to all dimensions of temptation.

But human weakness—whether real or perceived—is not the central theme of this petition. The central theme is God’s grace and strength in the moment of temptation. Do you know what, in my opinion, is the greatest temptation of all? The greatest temptation, in my opinion, is the temptation to succumb to defeatism, to think *I can never make it*, to imagine no repentance and forgiveness is possible after backsliding, to believe that the power of sin is greater than the power of Salvation, to think that in the moments when the Devil touches us, God actually leaves us. That is the greatest of all temptations.

Back in 1988 I met a young man in a Kenyan village who introduced himself to me and then added, “But I am not saved.” I asked him why he thought so. He replied, “But I smoke.” I told him, “Well, thanks for sharing that with me, but we shall discuss your smoking later. First tell me: ‘Do you deny the existence of God?’” He said, “No, I don’t.” I further asked, “Do you deny that God came down on earth in the person of Jesus Christ?” He said, “No, I don’t.” I asked him still further, “Do you deny that Christ has the power to forgive sins?” He said, “No, I don’t.” I finally asked this now perplexed young man, “Do you deny that Christ loves you enough to forgive you your sins?” To my great relief, he said, “No, I don’t.” So I told him, “Then, my friend, you *are* saved.” The young man could not believe it. He was completely astounded. He confessed to me that no pastor had talked to him like that, and then added, “But, *Mwalimu*, what about my smoking?” I laughed out aloud and told him, “I never decided that you should smoke, and I cannot decide that you should quit. It must be *your* decision. Why don’t you decide yourself about your smoking in consultation with Jesus?” He happily promised to me that he would. I have never since heard of this young friend of mine, but looking back, I say to myself: “Here is an example of a man who had succumbed to the greatest temptation. And his temptation was *not at all* of smoking! The greatest temptation that he had succumbed to was his mistaken belief that the power of his

vice was greater than the power of God's forgiveness and liberation in Christ. He had given himself away to eternal despair, only to the Devil's triumph!"

My friends, if we trust and depend on God, he is always close to us, and is closest when the Devil gets near to us! So, let us no longer fancy ourselves as "triumphant" toddlers who know nothing of falling. But let us behave like adult horse-riders. Once fallen, let us get up off the ground, shake the dust off our body, take a few deep breaths, look up unto heaven, get back on the horse, and get going. And believe in God's promise—I *will never leave you, nor forsake you.*

It is in the face of such bleak, inevitable, and universal reality of temptation that this petition—which could also be paraphrased as "Permit us not to fall into temptation" (after Jeremias)—becomes meaningful and consoling.

So, when we pray "Lead us not into temptation," we mean:

Lord, we do not boast before you of our ambition and strength to emerge triumphant in temptation.

Lord, we do not want to sport a test!

Lord we know we are more vulnerable to falling into temptation than emerging out triumphantly.

Therefore Lord, have mercy on our weakness, and lead us away from temptation.

"Lead us not into temptation" is a petition of deep soul-searching and complete surrender to God in absolute humility, a prayer compatible with the publican's prayer, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Shall we approach God with a realistic self-assessment and in all humility?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

But Deliver Us from Evil

“Because you have made the LORD Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, neither any plague come near your dwelling”

(Psalm 91:9-10)

Let me begin this chapter with a little rhetorical catechism. When you see a house on fire, do you conduct research on the origin of the fire and measures to be recommended for prevention of such calamities in future, *or* do you call the fire department?

When a dear one, or you yourself, are struck by disease, do you care to determine whether the disease was caused by a demonic attack, or God’s punishment for your sins, or the suffering of the righteous like Job of old, *or* do you call a doctor?

Such questions—and others in a similar vein, pertaining to the methodology of approaching the problem of evil—only help us in an academic sense, usually when there is no evil! But what happens when we find *ourselves* face to face with the very evil which could—perhaps another day—have provided us with an excellent research-problem? Our basic instinct for survival tells us that we would not want to have anything to do with evil. We would not want to see evil. We would not want to hear of it. It is in this sense that the Lord’s Prayer becomes meaningful, since it is evil from which deliverance has been sought in our present petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

An Old Problem

The problem of evil is perhaps as old as humanity itself. Parallel to the early Old Testament records—and probably even earlier—we come across the records of the deep human agony in coming to with the mystery of evil. From Egypt, for example, we have such ancient texts as “The Eloquent Peasant,” and “Satire on Trades.” From Mesopotamia we have texts like “A Dialogue of Pessimism between the Master and the Servant,” and “I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom,” (also known as “The Babylonian Job”). The famous work *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* edited by James B. Pritchard and published some 70 years ago still remains the standard reference point for the ancient texts I have mentioned above.

In the Old Testament, as we know, the two leading schools of thought—that is, the Deuteronomistic School and the Wisdom School—complement one another on the question of evil. According to the Deuteronomistic philosophy of retribution, evil is God’s punishment for human sins (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:15ff). However, according to the Wisdom School, not only the sinner, but even the most righteous person on the earth—such as Job was—could be struck with the third degree of evil, the kind of punishment reserved—according to the Deuteronomistic School—for the worst kind of sinners. The debate between the two philosophies is dramatically presented in the book of Job.

And What Do Philosophers Say?

Philosophers of the Christian era have been faithfully engaged in contemplation on the problem of evil. Arthur L. Herman, having surveyed the speculative thought—ranging from St. Augustine via G. W. Leibniz, J. S. Mill, Josiah Royce, and up to John Hick—has crystallized the contemporary positions on the problem of evil into 21 approaches or “solutions.” These are:

The Aesthetic Solution

The aesthetic whole is good, although the parts may be evil.

The Teleological Solution

Good comes ultimately out of evil.

The Prevention Solution

The evils we have are necessary to prevent greater evils.

The Contrast Solution

Evil is necessary to contrast with and point at the good.

The “Man is Free” Solution

Man with his free will is the cause of evil

The Discipline Solution

Evil disciplines us, and builds our character.

The Recompense Solution

Evils, such as unjust suffering, will be recompensed in heaven.

The Illusion Solution

Evil is surely an illusion, and not ultimately real.

The Counterpart Solution

Evil is merely the counterpart of good.

The Impersonal Substance Solution

Evil is caused by an impersonal substance, i.e. matter.

The Personal Substance Solution

Evil is caused by a personal substance i.e. Satan.

The Justice Solution

Evil is God’s just punishment for human sins.

The Necessity Solution

Evil is logically and metaphysically necessary for the existence of good.

The Worse Alternatives Solution

God hates evil but approves of what we get, for the alternatives could be worse!

The Creator Limitation Solution

God's choices are limited at the time of combating evil.

The Metaphor Solution

The language describing God and evil is merely metaphorical.

The Outweighs Solution

Evil is not always so bad as people say, as good often outweighs the evil.

The Rebirth Solution

Evil is due to the *Karma* of a previous birth

The Metaphysical Evil Solution

Evil in creation is caused by the imperfection of creation itself.

The "God Not All-Powerful" Solution

God is not Omnipotent, and so he needs our help in combating evil.

The Mystery Solution

Evil cannot be rationally explained. One must have faith to comprehend this mystery.

Of the above so-called solutions, the major chunk, (twelve approaches,) are found in Augustine alone whom Herman regards as a paradigm. Finally, Herman discusses the Indian philosophical approach to the problem of evil i.e. the doctrine of rebirth. According to this doctrine, our ignorance in thinking that various sensual pleasures are real and the resultant attachment with various impermanent aspects of existence puts us into bondage with actions (*Karma*) both good and bad. Consequences of these actions force us to be reborn into new forms of existence after we die. Thus, what

we are having in this life is as a consequence of our actions (*Karma*) in the previous life.

One thing that is abundantly clear about the conventional philosophical approaches is that they deal with the problem of evil in its generality and not its specific dimension i.e. when evil actually strikes a human individual. Philosophizing the specific dimension of evil results into the rather sad state of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zopher, the “friends” of Job.

The problems that philosophers have raised about the question of evil are oriented to contradictions within the being of God Himself. A. L. Herman concludes: “... When the specific properties of God are joined together, they produce, not a logically consistent set, but a practically inconsistent set”.

The eminent—though controversial—British philosopher of our times, Lord Bertrand Russell, in the preface to his collected essays *Why I Am Not a Christian*, observes with a certain amount of weariness:

Apart from logical cogency, there is to me something a little odd about the ethical valuation of those who think that an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent Deity, after preparing the ground by many millions of years of lifeless nebulae, would consider Himself adequately rewarded by the final emergence of Hitler and Stalin and the H-Bomb.

The philosophical and theological approach to the problem of evil entails identifying the correct causes, then isolating the conventional solutions, then subjecting those solutions to rigorous scientific testing, and carrying on in this manner until supposedly a little better set of solutions is finally discovered.

What to Do?

So what shall we do when evil actually strikes us? It is at this crucial juncture that we hear Jesus telling us, “Pray then like this ... but deliver us from evil” Social and scientific research on fire hazards

may only be conducted as long as there is no actual fire hazard! But when there is an actual fire hazard, then it is time to act, and to pray for aid, for deliverance—“Deliver us from evil”

The petition “deliver us from evil” has a strong scriptural warrant in almost all of the world’s major religions. In the Bible we read of many people who prayed this petition. Whether it is a Moses, or a David, or a Hezekiah, or an Isaiah or a Daniel, or a Paul and a Silas, there are people who prayed to God for deliverance out of evil and their prayers were duly answered.

Praying the prayer for deliverance is a unique experience. It is like calling the fire department or ringing up the doctor. Evil has actually struck us. We are in trouble. We are perishing. Deliverance is what is urgently needed now. The other details—diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive—let us leave them to the doctor, or the fire department (as the case may be). They are the experts. They will take care of all the methodological details.

“Deliver us from evil” is a petition that implies faith in God’s unfailing love, and his ability to deliver us out of evil. When faith in God’s love is achieved, doubts about the logical consistencies in his being dispel. They become secondary. I know that my late father loved me. And even today—although he has departed from this finite life into the infinite realms of existence—I know he still loves me. Now that *is* a great comfort to me. I may never be able to know my father’s entire history and fathom the depths of his being. I was not even in this world when he was born. I knew him much later—*after* I was born and began to discern things. But the fact that he loves me, assures me that I know my father, and know him well! Can’t we say the same thing for God, our eternal parent?

Evil Makes Us Partners with God

“Deliver us from evil” is a prayer which—apart from increasing our faith in God—also implies our true commitment to deliverance from evil. When we pray to God for deliverance, we become partners with him in his mission of deliverance. Prayer, as I understand it, is not merely a metaphysical form of telecommunication with God,

nor is it merely texting God on the event of some evil. Prayer is rather *a deal* with God! In prayer we approach God and inform him not of evil, but of our commitment to be his partners in deliverance. Philosophers may be able to prove that we are weak, and God too is logically inconsistent—a rather inadequate team to deliver the world of evil! But still God and we—in partnership—*can* establish his kingdom on this earth. Yes, in partnership with God, you and I *can* deliver the world of evil. At least that is what God’s Word tells us—*We are co-workers with God!*

I can never forget an episode, which happened when I was a child. It was in the early sixties. We were living in a tiny north Indian village, Jahanabad. One summer the entire area was hit by a severe wave of cholera. Death-toll went on higher and higher each day and each night. I still remember quite vividly. A sudden shriek of wailing would pierce through the silent atmosphere. Another death. One more funeral. Another man has become a widower. One more woman has lost her husband. Another child has become an orphan.

Oh, it was terrible! To quote St. Augustine—rather out of context—“In the midst of life, we truly *were* in death.” And death did reign supreme!

Amidst such a ghastly scene, the Government sent a doctor to our village. But he was just *one* doctor—not sufficient at all to deliver the whole village of the evil of cholera. You know what he did? He got hold of a number of volunteers, including my father, from among villagers of the same cholera-stricken village. And, then, this very imaginative doctor trained this lay-team of village volunteers—in a couple of hours’ time—in administering injections. Very soon the illiterate villagers, those who had perhaps never before so much as handled an empty syringe in their life—in a couple of hours—had become doctors! And why not? They were partners with the Doctor!

Just look at the situation again. A whole village is perishing from the evil of cholera. The only resources available is a bunch of survivors who know nothing of medicine, and a single doctor—a rather inadequate team, as I observed earlier. But together, in

partnership, they formed a powerful medical team, and the control of cholera was quick. Becoming partners with the Doctor, we delivered the village of evil!

Are we—weak and lay as we are—willing to become liberators in partnership with the Great Liberator, Jesus Christ, in liberating the world from evil?

So friends, amidst the prevailing evil this is our great dilemma. What to do? Should we attempt a philosophical analysis of the problem? Or should we pray to God and offer to become his partners in deliverance by praying: “Deliver us from evil”?

I conclude this chapter with a prayer of Professor W. Sibley Towner as found in his book *How God Deals with Evil*.

We thank you, O God, that you have put us in a world which moves within an intricate web of dependable and stable principles, even the principles which determine whether our bodies will live or die. Any other kind of world would be impossible to live in. Help us to strike a harmony with those principles in the midst of which we live so that we will not be living at cross purposes to you.

We thank you for your presence in trouble and in happiness, and ask for the courage to live for you and, when the time comes, to yield up our lives in the hope and certainty of further living with you. (Towner 1976, 154-55).

CHAPTER TWELVE

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, Forever and Ever Amen

“... To the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore. Amen! (Jude vs. 25)

Our Lord ended his classic prayer with the ascription of the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory to God alone. All these things are God's by right. In ascribing them to God we give nothing to God that is not already his. We just reaffirm a truth. “*Thine* is the kingdom, the power, and glory, indeed everything *is* thine and thine *alone*”.

Now there are two things—two approaches to life—which I wish to present in this last chapter. There is a human approach, a “mine” approach, a mistaken—and even sinful—affirmation, that every thing is *mine*. “*Mine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.” And then there is a divine approach, a “thine” approach, a right—and even obligatory—affirmation, that everything belongs to the one who created it. Everything is *thine*. “Thine is the kingdom...”

Thus this last part of the Lord's Prayer opens up two avenues for our consideration: The human “mine” and the divine “thine”.

The Human “Mine”

The human “mine” is an entirely human—a naturally human—approach. By “naturally human” I refer to the essentially corrupt and depraved human nature. How many times do we say: “Let nature takes its course.” Or: “After all, he (or she) is a human being.” But do we realize that appealing to human nature is no defence against sin, for human nature itself is sinful? It is this sinful nature that, according to the Bible, makes our life self-centred instead of Christ-centred. It is this selfish rat-race for personal glory that takes us away from God and our neighbour. It is this sinful “mine” approach that Our Lord calls upon us to deny when he lays down before us the cost of discipleship (Matthew 16:16-24). Let us look into the Bible and witness the disaster caused by the human “mine,” down the memory lane.

The Human “Mine” in the Bible

Let us begin at the Beginning. It was the human “mine” which made our greatest grandmother, Eve, to doubt God’s love and thus fall short of God’s glory. It was the human “mine” that made Cain kill his own dear brother Abel (Gen.4:1-16). It was the human “mine” which made Jacob and Esau—blood-brothers—to become blood-thirsty towards each other (Genesis ch. 25-26). It was the human “mine” which made Achan to steal from God’s portion and thereby bring God’s wrath upon the entire camp of Israel (Joshua ch. 7). It was the human “mine” which prompted King David to take his soldier, Uriah’s wife, and plot the murder of the faithful soldier in cold-blood (II Samuel ch. 11). It was the human “mine” which made Jezebel use her husband, King Ahab, as a puppet in a ghoulish project of oppression and murder (I Kings ch. 18-21). It was the human “mine” which made the prodigal son to cause a division in his own father’s property (Luke ch. 15). It was the human “mine” which made Peter to deny the Saviour even before an ordinary housemaid. (Luke 23:54-62). It was the human “mine” which prompted Judas Iscariot to betray the Master with a kiss for just a miserable thirty shillings (Matthew 26:47-56).

The Human “Mine” in other Faiths

The shocking testimony to the devastation caused by the human “mine” is by no means confined to the Bible. Even a cursory glance at the scriptures of other world’s faiths would speak to us volumes of the damage which the human “mine” has caused. Yes, it was the human “mine” which made the tyrant king Kansa to mercilessly kill his own dear sister Devaki’s offspring, fearing the prophecy that Devaki’s son Krishna would slay him. It was the human “mine” which caused Ravana to kidnap Rama’s beloved wife Sita. And it was the human “mine” which made Yazid of Arabia to wage war against Muslims in which Hussain, the able and valiant son of Mohammad’s daughter Fatima, was killed by thirst in the scorching desert of Karbalah.

It was the human “mine” which created a Herod and a Nero, a Hitler and a Mussolini, a Franco and a Nadir Shah Durrani, an Ahmed Shah Abdali and a Taimur and an Idi AMin dada—such a host of tyrants who have coloured the pages of human history with so much human blood.

The Human “Mine”: Just One Step Between Sin and Virtue

My dear friends, whenever humans have reversed the Prayer to say: “Mine is the kingdom, and the power and glory...”, lots of innocent human blood has been shed. Systematic oppression of innocent humans has followed. Popular Governments have been overthrown to be replaced by tyrannical anarchism. Even in our present-day sophisticated context, constitutions have been amended and radical structural and administrative changes have been introduced in religious as well secular agencies just in order to pamper the whims of the human “mine”.

The human ‘mine’ adversely affects the human life at all levels. Once, a friend of mine shared with me the agony of his dissatisfaction with his wife. “Look here C. B.,” he passionately appealed to me, “The real problem is with my wife. She does not realize how much I love her.” I knew in my heart that my friend was mistaken. True enough, he *did* love his wife, no doubt about it. But that love was

tainted with the human “mine”. It was not first-class love, if I may put it that way. It would have been first class love if my friend had got rid of his human “mine”. That is, if instead of wanting recognition and gratitude from his wife for “how much he loved her,” he himself would become able to empty himself of *himself*! If, instead of thinking of how much he loved this (ungrateful) wife of his, he would be thinking how much his wife loved him! And, on her part, the wife would be thinking of the love of her husband. And so the human ‘mine’ deprived an apparently-loving husband and wife of enjoying the greatest fruit of love—the assurance of belonging to, and being loved by someone.

It is the human “mine” which supports the exploitative and oppressive system of cut-throat competition and merciless profiteering in the market. Sometimes there is only one step between sin and virtue. And that step is marked by the human ‘mine’—“mine is the kingdom and the power and glory.”

This ascription of glory and power to the human mine in life’s struggle causes a large-scale cold-war to go on between leaders of the church and society. In this fierce cold-war between the high and the mighty, many innocent are victimised. Friends, the human mine is a dangerous thing.

The Divine “Thine”

But, thank God, there *is* a sane alternative to the human “mine,” an alternative which wipes away all tears, causes all wars to cease, heals all wounds, and bridges the gaps between God and humanity, between hell and heaven. That is the alternative of the divine “thine.” *Thine* is the kingdom and the power and the glory.” *Thine*, yes *thine alone*. It is the divine *thine* that sets God apart from humans, saints from sinners. By divine “thine,” I do not merely mean to think of God as the real other but also to think of other human beings.

The Divine “Thine” in the Bible

It was the divine “thine” which made Joseph to risk his life in defence of his high moral ideals (Genesis 39:7-23). It was the divine “thine”

which made Moses to relinquish the royal comforts to become a fugitive commoner (Hebrews 11:24-28). It was the divine “thine” which made judges in the Old Testament to stand up in the battles of liberation. And it was the divine “thine” that prompted prophets of the Old Testament to confront Kings, at great risks and peril to their own lives. It was the divine “thine” which made young David to offer his services and his life in a single-handed battle against the giant Goliath (I Samuel ch.17). It was the divine “thine” which made Mattathias to refuse to Prostrate himself before the image of Antiochus IV and thus to start the Maccabean revolt.

Friends, it was the divine “thine” which made God to incarnate in human flesh in the Person of his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. It was the divine “thine” which made Christ to perfect God’s love by his own death on the Cross. It was the divine thine which made God a servant of humans as Christ emptied himself completely (Phil.2:1-10).

The Divine “Thine” in Human History

It was the divine “thine” which strengthened the early martyrs to hold fast to their faith to the very end, and embrace death for one whose love never fails. It was the divine “thine” which made Martin Luther to risk his life for the liberation of the Church from the bondage of cult and tradition. It was the divine “thine” which inspired reformers to carry out their great mission. It was the divine “thine” which made William Tyndale to translate the Bible for the first time into English, a daring action for which he was burnt alive in 1536.

It is the divine “thine” which has given rise to such modern martyrs as Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Fr. Damien, John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bishop Oscar Romero, and a host of others.

The Divine “Thine” Wow!

The divine “thine.” Oh, what an experience, what a life-transforming experience! When we pray, “Thine is the power and the kingdom and the glory,” when we begin to think of God and others as “the

real other,” things begin to change. Life becomes truly beautiful, and the world really worth living in.

Back in the mid 1970's, I saw a Hindi movie *Do Bund Pani* (“Two Drops of Water”). It is about a drinking-water project in the deserts of Rajasthan (India). In the beginning of the movie, a monument in the desert is depicted—a stone pillar with two words engraved on it: *Tu pi*. (You drink, please). It is related to the folk tale of a newly-wed couple who are going to start their married life. The bride sits on a camel and the groom is walking, leading the beast. When they are thirsty, they know they have very little water with them and a long way to go under the scorching heat of the desert. The husband breaks the silence and utters his first words ever to his wife: *Tu pi*. (You drink, please). And the wife responds: *Tu pi*. (You drink, please). Both of them loved each other so much that each refused to drink water before the other was satisfied. They went on saying *Tu pi* (You drink, please) till they become exhausted by dehydration and died in the desert. I believe that they had experienced the divine “thine!” I believe that the love of Christ was working in and through them.

In the 15th century, roughly contemporary to Martin Luther, there was a young storekeeper in Punjab, north-west India. He was in charge of the royal grain store. One day he was supervising the weighing of some grain out of the store. You know, in traditional India, when people have to count out several measures of grain, they go on repeating the number so that they may remember how many measures they have weighed out. So this storekeeper started to repeat the number of every measure. When he came to the thirteenth measure, the number that he heard himself repeating to himself was *Terah* (13). Now, a similar sounding word (*Tera*) in Hindustani also means “Thine.” So while repeating the word *Terah*, this man forgot all about the grain and the measures and the weighing, but started to think of “Thine.” *God Everything is thine, we and the world and this nature and everything is thine O God, the kingdom, the power and the glory.* He was so deeply overwhelmed by the experience of the divine “thine,” that he went into a spiritual trance. He

subsequently gave up his job and became a prophet for his people. This man, as we know, was none other than Guru Nanak himself, the founder of Sikhism. It was the Divine Thine which changed an ordinary storekeeper into a prophet of God's love.

Friends, Our Lord taught us to pray "Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory." He not only taught this prayer but actually lived it through his life and death. It is time to ask: *Where is the Church today?* In human "mine" or in divine "thine"? Where are the leaders of the church and society? In human "mine" or in divine "thine"? Where are you and me? In human "mine" or in divine "thine"? May God's love in Jesus Christ fill us with the supremely blissful and life-transforming experience of the Divine *Thine*,

Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen!

Our Father

References

- Barclay, William. 1964. *The plain man looks at the Lord's Prayer*. London: Collins Fontana Books
- Covey, Stephen. *The seven habits of highly effective people*
- Craig, Charles Tucker. 1951. "The proclamation of the kingdom," *Interpreter's Bible*. Vol 7. Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press Ltd. 145-54.
- Dibelius, Martin. 1949. *Jesus*. Trans. Charles B. Hedrick and Frederick C. Grant. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Dodd, C. H. 1935. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd.
- Gaster, T. H. 1962. "Heaven," *Interpreter's dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 2 (E-J) Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press Ltd. 551-52.
- Hunter, A. M. 1950. *The work and words of Jesus*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Jeremias, Joachim. 1967. *The prayers of Jesus*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Klausner, Joseph. 1925. *Jesus of Nazareth: his life, times, and teaching*. Eng. Trans. Herbert Danby. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Lewis, C. S. 1952. *Mere Christianity*. London: Collins Fontana Books. Reprint 1970 (Page reference are to reprint edition).
- Muilenburg, James. 1962. "Holiness," *Interpreter's dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 2 (E-J) Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press Ltd. 617-25
- Otto, Rudolf. 1923. *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press.

- Peter, C. B. 1980. "In Defence of Existence: A Comparison Between Ecclesiastes and Albert Camus," *Bangalore theological forum*. Vol. XII, No. 1 (January-June): 26-43.
- Procksch, Otto. 1964. "Hagios," *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed Gerhard Kittel. Eng trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Company. 88-97, 100-112.
- Robinson, J. A. T. 1963. *Honest to God*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1967. *Why I am not a Christian*. London: Rowledge.
- Slack, Kenneth. 1973. *Praying the Lord's Prayer today*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Taylor, Vincent. 1954. *The life and ministry of Jesus*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.
- Towner, W. Sibley. 1976. *How God deals with evil*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Traub, Helmut. 1967. "Ouranos," *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed Gerhard Kittel. Eng trans. Gerhard Friedrich Vol. V. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Company. 497-502.
- Tsevet, M. 1976. "King, God As." *Interpreter's dictionary of the Bible [Supplementary Volume]*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. 1967. "Ouranos in the Old Testament," *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Eng trans. Gerhard Friedrich Vol. V. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Company. 502-509

Index of Personal Names

Albright, W. F. 64
Amirtham, Samuel 39

Barclay, William 62
Browning, Robert 9

Cadoux, C. J. 29
Cave, Sydney 29
Camus, Albert 35
Chander, Krishan 52
Covey, Stephen 57
Craig, C. T. 28

Dibelius, Martin 26
Dodd, C. H. 29
Dodd, Marcus 65

Gaster, T. H. 12

Haqq, Abdul 33
Haqq, Aqbar Abdul 33
Harnack, Adolph 29
Henkl, Viktor 57, 58
Herman, Arthur L. 67, 73
Hick, John 67
Hunter, A. M. 25, 28
Huxley, Aldous 11

Jackson, George 29
Jeremias, Joachim 62, 64, 65,
66

Klausner, Joseph 26, 27

Leibniz, G. W. 67
Lewis, C. S. 5, 6
Luther, Martin 81, 82

Macmillan, Clarence O. 16
Mann, C. S. 64
Marx, Karl 23, 41
Mill, J. S. 67
Muilenburg, James 15, 16

Nanak, Guru 21, 81
Neil, Stephen 15

Otto, Rudolf 2, 7, 15

Procksch, Otto 16

Robinson, John A.T. 9
Royce, Josiah 67
Russell, Bertrand 73

Schleiermacher 2
Shepherd, Dick 28
Singh, Sadhu Sunder 9
Slack, Kenneth 62, 65

Taylor, Vincent 29
Towner, W. Sibley 76

Index

Traub, Helmut 11
Tsevet, M. 26
Tyndale, William 81

Von Rad, Gerhard 11

White, Bouck 28

- Auditing Priniples: A Stuent's Handbook* by Musa O. Nyakora (2007) *The Concept of Botho and HIV/AIDS in Botswana* edited by Joseph B. R. Gaie and Sana K. MMolai (2007)
- Captive of Fate: A Novel* by Ketty Arucy (2007)
- A Guide to Ethics* by Joseph Njino (2008)
- Pastoral Theology: Rediscovering African Models and Methods* by Ndung'u John Brown Ikenye (2009)
- The Royal Son: Balancing Barthian and African Christologies* by Zablon Bundi Mutongu (2009)
- AIDS, Sexuality, and Gender: Experiencing of Women in Kenyan Universities* by Nyokabi Kamau (2009)
- Modern Facilitation and Training Methodology: A Guide to Best Practice in Africa* by Frederick Chelule (2009)
- How to Write a Winning Thesis* by Simon Kang'ethe et al (2009)
- Absolute Power and Other Stories* by Ambrose Rotich Keitany (2009)
- Y'sdom in Africa: A Personal Journey* by Stanley Kinyeki (2010)
- Abortion and Morality Debate in Africa: A Philosophical Enquiry* by George Kegode (2010)
- The Holy Spirit as Liberator: A Study of Luke 4: 14-30* by Joseph Koech (2010)
- Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities*, Gen. Ed. James N. Amanze (2010)
- Modeling for Servant-Leaders in Africa: Lessons from St. Paul* by Ndung'u John Brown Ikenye (2010)
- HIV & AIDS, Communication and Secondary Education in Kenya* By Ndeti Ndati (2011)
- Disability, Society and Theology: Voices from Africa* By Samuel Kabue et al (2011)
- If You Have No Voice Just Sing!: Narratives of Women's Lives and Theological Education at St. Paul's University* By Esther Mombo And Heleen Joziassse (2011)
- Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912-2012)* By Julius Gathogo (2011)
- The Bible and African Culture: Mapping Transactional Inroads* By Humphrey Waweru, (2011)
- Karl Jaspers 'Philosophy of Existence: Insights for Our Time* By Cletus N. Chukwu (2011)
- Diet of Worms: Quality of Catering in Kenyan Prisons* By Jacqueline Cheptekkeny Korir (2011)

Our Father: An Indian Christian Prays the Lord's Prayer

I offer the reader a word of warning: be prepared. Be prepared to think and reflect deeply about your own beliefs. You are about to read a shocking book! Be prepared to assess honestly your own spiritual life of prayer and discipleship in your daily living; you are about to read a book that persistently asks you to engage in such honest assessment. This short book is profound in many ways, not the least of which is in its challenges to us, its readers.

Our Father is an accessible but theologically astute book, employing sound biblical scholarship, systematic theological reflection, and socio-cultural assessment to help us understand the profound implications for our time in history, of the sixty-seven words that comprise the Lord's Prayer. It also reflects the wisdom, love of storytelling, and delightful humor of its author, the Reverend Christopher Benjamin Peter, known as "CB" to the countless students, lay people, clergy, and colleagues he has influenced in his years of scholarship, teaching, and ministry.

Dr. John Blevins
Associate Research Professor, Rollins School of Public Health
Emory University, Atlanta, GA (USA)

CB's contribution is unique. He aptly brings out the reality that is in the power of praying with the words of the Lord's Prayer, a spiritual exercise that is totally different from simple recitation or even ingenious exegesis of the same prayer. The idea that the Lord's Prayer petitions the oneness of heaven and earth, the oneness of all humanity as the children of one Father, the integration of all dimensions of one humanity standing in need of the providence of one and the only God—to feed, to forgive, to preserve from temptation, to deliver from evil, etc—is a fresh line of thought that CB explores. His contribution is truly a valuable offering that, understood correctly, can aid refresh our perspectives every time we offer our prayer in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

The Rev. Canon Professor Joseph Galgalo
Vice Chancellor, St. Paul's University
Limuru , Kenya

